

WILD WEST



WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

No. 164

NEW YORK, DEC. 8, 1905

Price 5 Cents

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AT DEATH
DIVIDE.

or, Arietta's Great Fight.

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Published Weekly — By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Application made for Second Class entry at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1905, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.

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YOUNG WILD WEST AT DEATH DIVIDE

OR,

ARIETTA'S GREAT FIGHT.

BY AN OLD SCOUT.

CHAPTER I.

YOUNG WILD WEST HEARS OF A TREASURE CAVE.

"Everybody get ready! Let the music start when I say 'Go'! The dance is about to start! Here she goes!"

A report of a revolver rang out, the strains of a fiddle were heard, and four couples on horseback were seen galloping across the divide known throughout the West as the "horse-

!"

was performed so neatly that a burst of applause came from the score of cowboys who were in-

of the reins

The shout that went up fairly drowned the music. It was a curious, not to say picturesque, scene.

On a level plot of grass land on the bank of the Rio Grande the "horseback quadrille" was taking place.

It was at Buckhorn Ranch, and Young Wild West and his sweetheart, Arietta Murdock, were the head couple.

Young Wild West was the owner of the ranch, and with his friends had come down to stop a short time at the ranch.

He was the recognized Champion Deadshot of the West, was commonly called the Prince of the Saddle and was interested in several mining properties throughout the diggings of the wild West.

Young Wild West, though but a boy in years, was every inch a man otherwise.

Of medium height and weight, strong and active as a young lion, and with a quickness and coolness that was unsurpassed, he was surely the ideal young American of the great Wild West.

Bare-headed and with his long chestnut hair streaming behind him as he guided his handsome sorrel stallion, in the dance he appeared to be a perfect

heat-fitting hunting-suit of buckskin decorated with scarlet fringe, and this gave to his athletic form to the best advantage

Black, his pretty sweetheart and blonde of something like eight- and reared in the troublous a fitting companion for the

dashing young deadshot, who knew not the meaning of the word called fear.

The other head couple in the quadrille consisted of Jim Dart, a boy of about the same age as our hero, and his sweetheart, Eloise Gardner, who, by the way, was a rather delicate girl of the brunette type.

One of the sides were Cheyenne Charlie, the ex-government scout and Indian fighter, and his wife, Anna, and the other was filled by Hoss Thompson, the foreman of the ranch, and his wife, Stella.

The fiddler was an eccentric sort of a fellow named Jasper Down, who did the repair work on the ranch and who claimed to be an inventor, though he had never invented anything yet that "panned out" any better than a fizzle.

The guitar player was a lazy Mexican who did chores and helped around the house when he was not smoking and playing his instrument or sleeping.

The man calling off the figures of the dance was a big raw-boned cowboy named Trusty Jerry, who was one of the head men on the ranch.

Trusty Jerry kept on calling off the figures in stentorian tones and the quadrille went through to the end.

It was a bright, sunshiny day in December, and as there was nothing on hand just then, Young Wild West had proposed the dance and called the cowboys in to witness it.

There could not possibly be four couples that could beat them at the horseback quadrille, and as they had not performed it in a long time, our hero thought it would be a good idea to keep in practice.

When the applause had subsided he turned to the men and said:

"That is the way we used to do it when we had anything going on up in Weston, boys. I guess we haven't forgotten it yet. It is the first time that we ever tried it with Hoss and his wife, but I think they did as well as the rest of us."

"You bet!" came the response.

"Three cheers fur Young Wild West!" added Trusty Jerry, waving his hat in the air.

The cheers were given with a will, everybody joining in.

Our friends were still seated on their horses when a greasy-looking Mexican came up from the river bank.

He had just crossed in a punt which he had tied to a tree, and with his peaked sombrero in his hand he came up and paused before the Mexican, who had been accompanying the fiddler with his guitar.

He said something to him in Spanish, and the Mexican sprang to his feet so quickly that the looker-on was surprised.

The two talked for perhaps two minutes, and then the Mexican turned to our hero and said:

"Disa my brother Pedro; he is a grand. He finda a place in mountain where he finda treasure, but bad Mexicans no want to go. He thinka he finda somet'ing, and he want to go."

"What's that?" asked Young Wild West, interested at once.

"Can you speak Spanish?"

the man who had just come up.

"Yes, me a-speak Spanish."

"Well, what about this treasure, then? You come here to tell your brother?"

"Me hear dat you greata boy; youa do what youa want to do—no fraid bad Mexicans. Me tinka youa lika go to help me get da gold."

Wild sized him up and was forced to come to the conclusion that the Mexican was dreadfully in earnest.

His whole manner now indicated that he was more than anxious about something.

"Ther galoot seems ter act as though there's somethin' in what he's talkin' about, Wild," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, the scout, twisting his heavy black mustache and looking interested.

"Fetch your brother in the house and we'll have a talk with him," said Young Wild West, nodding to the peon.

The cowboys realized that the fun was over for the present, so they retired to their quarters.

Our friends went into the house, followed by the two Mexicans.

Then Wild proceeded to question Pedro closely and managed to glean the following from him:

Two weeks before, while lost in the wildness of the mountains some forty miles from the little town of Montezuma, Pedro accidentally fell into a cave as the dirt gave way while he was descending a slope.

He was trying his best to get out of the cave in a hurry when his eyes caught upon something that caused him to stop.

It was a big marble slab resting upon a carved stone, and upon it was a human skull and two human hands.

Pedro was much astonished, as can well be imagined.

But he plucked up courage enough to examine the thing.

They were filled with Spanish gold coins of the sixteenth century.

The Mexican had simply been making a trip to the mountain for the purpose of looking for treasure.

He had been living in the little town he lived in, and he was a native of the country.

He was a dazzy fellow, and he was a little bit of a fool.

He was a little bit of a fool, and he was a little bit of a fool.

him until he did tell when a troop of Mexican regulars came along.

The brigands fled in dismay and Pedro was saved.

But Pedro was sharp enough not to tell the soldiers anything about his wonderful find.

If he did he knew only too well that his share of the treasure would be but a small portion, indeed.

He decided to tell no one but his brother, who worked at Buckhorn Ranch, on the Texas side of the Rio Grande.

He had heard much about Young Wild West, and how he never failed to accomplish anything he started in to do, and if his brother could only induce "the splendid Senor Young Wild West," as he put it, to accompany him to the treasure cave he would feel sure that the treasure would be recovered by them, in spite of the band of brigands that was most likely hanging about the vicinity.

Young Wild West and his friends listened to this wonderful tale and carefully weighed the words of the Mexican.

"Your story sounds all right," said our hero, after a pause. "If it isn't a true one I guess you'd make a pretty good writer of fiction. What did you do with the coin you managed to keep the robbers from getting?"

"Oh! Me forget! Me got da coin righta here."

His hand dove in his pocket and out came a gold coin.

Wild took it and soon decided that it was genuine.

"That is worth twenty dollars all right," he said. "Two big urns full of them would make a neat little fortune."

"Plenty a-more in da cave," said Pedro. "Justa dig and find a-plenty."

"Oh, Wild!" exclaimed Arietta; "you said we were to take a little ride in Mexico before we went north again. Why can't we go and look for this treasure and kill two birds with one stone?"

"But Pedro says there is a band of fierce bandits in the mountains where he found the treasure," replied our hero.

"Well, I guess they could not hurt us much. You are not afraid of Mexican robbers, are you?"

"Well, no. But I am afraid they might get hold of you, Et."

"I will take my chances. You could take along some of the cowboys, and then if we were attacked I guess the robbers would soon be glad to run away."

"Well, I guess I will have to talk this over with my partners, Charlie and Jim, Et. Pedro, you may stop here with your brother till to-morrow morning. Then I will let you know what we are going to do about this treasure business."

"Good!" answered the Mexican, his eyes brightening. "Me feela sure Young Wild West will go. Me have a-told da truth, senor."

"Well, I must say that I believe you have."

"T'anka you, senor."

When the two Mexicans had retired from their presence Cheyenne Charlie looked at Wild and said:

"I reckon we could have some excitement over ther line, even if we didn't find no treasure," he remarked.

"Then you would like to go, eh, Charlie?"

"Yes, I reckon I would. We could ride down there in two days. An' we could have plenty of fun on ther way, most likely."

"How about you, Jim? What do you think about it?"

"A trip like that would just suit me," was the quick reply from Dart.

"That settles it, then! We'll go."

"How about us?" spoke up Arietta. "Anna, Eloise and myself would like to have a look at Old Mexico in its wildness. We would not interfere with your plans, I hardly think."

"All right, Et, you may go."

So it was settled that they would go and look for the treasure cave in the mountains of Old Mexico.

CHAPTER II.

THE BANDITS.

Young Wild West was pretty certain that there was some truth in what Pedro, the Mexican, had said, even if he had largely exaggerated.

The gold coin was surely one that had been brought over from Spain at the time Cortez had invaded that country and whipped the Aztecs into submission.

But our hero seldom made a mistake in estimating the truthfulness of a man.

That night at the supper-table the proposed trip down in Old Mexico was discussed thoroughly, and the result was that they decided to start out the first thing the following morning.

Wild thought it would be no more than right to let Pedro know that they were going with him, and he also wanted to have an understanding with him in regard to the division of the treasure should they find it.

So after supper he called him and had a talk with him.

Pedro declared that he was willing to take one-quarter of what was found for his share, and if the "Senor Americano" thought that was too much he would abide by what he said.

Wild laughed and replied:

"Pedro, I am not one of the sort who grab up everything they can get hold of regardless of the rights of others. You should have at least one-half of what there is in the cave, since you are the one who discovered it. It all belongs to you, I should say, and all you have to do is to go and get it."

"Dat da trouble, senor," was the reply. "I know a-not who to take with me to a-get the treasure. My people like da money so a-much da might leave nothing for Pedro."

"Oh! You are afraid to trust your own friends, then, eh?"

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders.

"My brother a-tell me 'bout you; you a-go with me; you a-take three-fourths, me taka one; dat suit Pedro."

"All right, then. You will just sign your name to a paper to that effect, and then there will be no trouble if there is a division to be made."

"Me sign da paper."

Wild drew up a brief agreement and read it to him.

His brother, the peon, could read English much better than he could, so he was brought in.

He nodded with sparkling eyes as he perused the document.

"Dat a-fine!" he declared.

Pedro signed it without any hesitation and Wild put the paper in the safe that was in the ranch-house.

The next morning our friends set out for Montezuma.

This was a quaint old town, not very large, but on the scale of the old-time Mexican cities.

Wild had never been there, but he had heard about it.

It was infested part of the time with innumerable thieves and bandits, who managed to elude the police and soldiers constantly on the lookout for them.

But the lookout that a Mexican soldier or policeman keeps is not as vigilant as it might be.

The richness of the country and the abundant supply of vegetable products made easy living for them, so they were inclined to be lazy.

But they had no particular liking for Americans, and if any of them came across the Rio Grande and behaved badly they made it a point to be rather severe with them.

Our friends rode up to the nearest bridge and crossed the river.

There were just ten in the party, not counting Pedro.

Neither Hoss Thompson nor his wife could spare the time to make the trip, so Wild took along Trusty Jerry and three of the other cowboys.

That made seven males in the party, all well armed and prepared to defend themselves in case of an attack from the bandits Pedro had spoken of.

Pedro was armed, too, but Wild did not figure, from his manner, that he would put up much of a fight.

As they rode over the bridge and entered upon Mexican soil the soldiers who were stationed there looked at them closely, but did not offer to stop them.

Wild figured on making at least seventy miles that day, and as they had two pack-horses with them, it behooved them not to tarry.

They struck out of the trail leading south and rode on through a pretty tropical country.

Though it was the month of December, the weather was warm, and the sun as it got toward the zenith was hot.

At noon they halted at a wild spot on the east range of the Mexican Rockies and decided to rest for a couple of hours.

Young Wild West always made it a point to stop where there was water to be had, if it was possible to find any, and as there was a trickling stream coming down from the peak above, they were in just the kind of spot he wanted.

They had met very few travelers that morning and had overtaken none.

Our hero figured that they had made nearly forty miles. The road they had been following was a pretty good one and the pack-horses had been pretty well on the jump.

Now the animals were stripped of their loads and turned out to graze with the rest.

There is plenty of game to be had in the forests of Mexico, and they had shot what they would need as they rode along without having to take the trouble of diverging from the path.

The noonday meal was soon prepared and it was eaten with a relish by all hands.

Then, after a reasonable rest, they set out again.

It was along about the middle of the afternoon that they overtook a party of horse men resting beneath a bunch of Mexican palms.

There were nearly two dozen of them, as far as our friends could judge quickly as they rode up, and they were all attired in the picturesque costumes peculiar to their race.

Their brightly-colored sashes shone in the sunlight in a pleasing way to our friends, and as they arose to look at the strangers the enormous spurs attached to their boot-heels clinked and jingled.

A rather handsome, active man of thirty was evidently the leader, for he was attired in a costume that was far more elaborate and expensive in make-up than any of the rest.

It was quite natural that Young Wild West should call a halt before the Mexicans, and he did so.

But it struck him right away that they were a bad lot.

However, that made little difference to him.

"Resting yourselves, senors?" he said, nodding to the man who was apparently the leader.

"Si, senor," was the reply. "Where are you traveling to, if I may ask?"

He used excellent English, though he had spoken the first words in Spanish.

"We are going to Montezuma," answered Wild. "How far have we to travel to reach it?"

"You can reach it in another day if you keep moving, as you Americans like to do. Ah!"

At that moment the leader of the band of Mexicans caught sight of Pedro.

The Mexican who was leading our friends to the treasure cave showed signs of great uneasiness, and when he saw the leader looking at him intently he exclaimed:

"Senor Young Wild West, dat a-man is Don Aguillo, da capitan of da bandits! Da all a-bad men; da a-roñ you!"

"Carramba!" hissed the leader of the men under the trees, drawing his short sword.

Instantly his men seized their weapons, some of them drawing knives and others pistols.

But Young Wild West had anticipated some such a movement.

With a quick movement he jerked out one of his six-shooters and had Don Aguilla covered.

"Don't get excited, senor," he said, calmly. "No one is going to hurt you if you behave yourselves."

Wild did not have the words out of his mouth before Charlie and Jim and the cowboys had drawn their revolvers.

Then Arietta coolly swung her rifle around and held it pointed at the leader of the Mexicans.

"Carramba!" hissed the captain of the gang. "What does this mean?"

"It means that we will stand no humbugging, senor," answered Wild. "You may have had the idea that you were going to hold us up and make us pay toll, but you made a mistake if you did. We are going on our way when we get ready without paying toll to anyone. I hope you understand what I say."

"Shoot the American dogs!" cried Don Aguilla, flying into a rage and addressing his men.

Wild laughed.

"I'd like to see them try it," he said. "Just take it easy, you cur of a greaser! Calm yourself. So you are Don Aguilla, the captain of the bandits, eh? Well, you are what I call about the easiest man to handle I ever run across."

The Mexican fairly turned blue in the face, but by a great effort he calmed himself.

"Pass on!" he exclaimed. "We are honest men—not bandits. But beware of me, for we may meet again."

"All right. If we do meet again look out for yourself! We won't be trifled with, I want you to understand."

"I will remember you!"

"Well, to help you, I will tell you my name. I am Young Wild West, and I never met the man I was afraid of! That is saying a great deal, perhaps, senor, but it is the truth."

"I will remember you, Young Wild West. And I will remember the pretty senorita who is taunting me by pointing her gun at me. She will smile on the other side of her face before she is many days older! I am Don Aguilla, and I never make threats without carrying them out."

"Oh, is that so? Well, I have often seen men shot for making threats. I don't consider you worth shooting just now, but I may later on. Good-day, senors!"

With that our hero urged his horse forward, still keeping the Mexican leader covered.

His companions also started their horses forward, Pedro taking care to forge ahead of them in a hurry.

Two or three of the band called out something to him in Spanish, but Pedro did not deign to answer them.

Around a bend in the trail our friends rode, leaving the band of Mexicans under the trees.

"If they attempt to follow us give them a dose of hot lead, boys!" said our hero, coolly. "They are a treacherous lot."

But the band of villains did not offer to follow them.

"What did they say to you, Pedro?" asked Jim Dart, riding up to the man who was leading them to the spot where he claimed the treasure to be.

"Da say da know-a dat I take a-you to da place where I find-a da money two a-weeks ago," was the reply.

"Oh! They did, eh?"

"I thought that was what they were driving at," said Wild. "I know enough of Spanish to catch the drift of things. Well, if they know it it won't do them any good, I guess. We will be able to take care of them."

But Wild did not think the villains were not to be feared, however.

He knew that they would be apt to prove dangerous customers if they could only catch them unawares.

He was a little surprised that some of them had not opened fire on them when Don Aguilla gave the command.

But when he came to think of it he could understand that they must have appeared quite formidable to the scoundrels with their drawn revolvers and Arietta with her rifle leveled, ready to send out a rain of hot lead.

They were lucky enough to strike a good place to camp for the night, and a little after six o'clock they stopped and unloaded the pack-horses.

It did not take long to put up the two tents they had with them, and then a fire was kindled and supper was cooked.

With plenty of good, fresh game and coffee and hard biscuits they made a good meal.

"Boys, we have got to keep a sharp watch to-night," said Wild, looking at his two partners and the cowboys. "The bandits may take a notion to attack us before morning, and if they do we want to know something about it before they do much damage."

"Well, two of us kin each put in a couple of hours, an' that won't make anybody lose much sleep, I reckon," answered Cheyenne Charlie.

The watch started from the moment it got good and dark.

But as the night passed they found that the Mexicans did not show up.

Wild and Jim were the last two to go on guard, and when daylight finally came they thought they knew why it was that the bandits had let them alone.

"They want to follow us up till they find where Pedro is taking us, I guess," said Wild. "Well, let them. We must do something to throw them off the track just before we get there. I will have a talk with Pedro."

So the second day's journey to the treasure cave began.

CHAPTER III.

DEATH DIVIDE.

Young Wild West and his friends had not traveled more than ten miles on the second day of their journey

when they overtook a rather curious outfit which was at a halt in the road.

It was a buckboard wagon with two bony horses hitched to it.

On the seat of a wagon sat a slovenly-looking Mexican woman who must have weighed all of two hundred pounds, and fixing the harness was a tall, lanky man with a long chin-beard.

They both looked around as our friends rode up and the man straightened up and called out:

"Hello, thar! I'm mighty glad ter see some of my own countrymen travelin' ther same way as I be goin'. How do yer do, all of yer?"

"First class!" answered Wild, as he rode up at the head of the line and came to a halt near the team and buckboard.

The woman on the seat nodded pleasantly to the girls.

"It is a fine day," she said in very good English.

"Yes," retorted Arietta; "very fine day, indeed. Has anything broken? If so, maybe we can help you."

"It's all right now," spoke up the man. "One of ther traces took a notion ter go an' bust a little while ago, but I've got it fixed now. Much obleeged ter yer. Where be yer bound, strangers, if I ain't too inquisitive?"

"Oh, we are simply taking a little pleasure trip in the mountains out this way. We just came over from our ranch, which is on the other side of the Rio Grande," answered our hero.

"Is that so? Well, it's funny how some folks kin git pleasure, ain't it? I don't think there's much fun a-ridin' around these here rough an' rocky roads. But, you see, everybody don't think alike. We're bound ter Montezuma, which is where my wife is from. I met her up in El Paso, an' we fell in love with each other. We got married ther day afore yisterday, an' now I'm goin' ter Montezuma ter run ther ranch what she owns there. We're a happy couple, ain't we, Hortense?"

"Very happy," answered the lovely Hortense, blushing like a rose.

"You see, my wife was livin' with an American family so long in El Paso that she l'arned how ter talk our language like a book. Her old man died about a month ago, an' then she got word that he'd left her a well-stocked ranch. All she needed was a husband then, an' when I come along she gobbled me up like a hungry trout snappin' at a fly. Oh, I'm all right, I am! I know all about runnin' a ranch an' farmin'. I spent fifteen years on a farm in Vermont, an' I've been ranchin' in Texas fur ten more. I'm jest forty-one years old, which ain't too old ter love a good woman, is it, Hortense?"

"Oh, no!" and the fat woman blushed some more and showed an even set of white teeth which helped along in her good looks wonderfully.

"I calculate I'd better introduce myself, since I've told yer my wife's name," resumed the lanky man. "My name are Zeke Putnam. What might be your names?"

Wild told him, enumerating everyone in the party.

"Glad ter make your acquaintance. Say! Can't yer stop over at our ranch an' see us afore yer go back ter Texas? I don't know jest what kind of a place it is, 'cause I never seen it, but Hortense says as how it's all right. You'd better make up your minds ter call on us afore yer leave Mexico. It would be pleasin' fur me ter see an' talk with my own kind of people, yer know. I s'pose I'll have a deuced of a time larnin' ther Spanish lingo, but I'm doin' a whole lot towards larnin' it. Sic temper tyrannus! Polly vous Fransay! Wheat-cakes all der vile! Bon jurin, senorina! Aromy de Cuba, Habana! La Flor de West Injy Islands! How's that?"

Everybody laughed at this, the eccentric Yankee's wife doing the most of it.

"I understand every word you say, partner, only I don't know what you mean," said Cheyenne Charlie, drily. "You're a feller what kin speak any language, I reckon."

"Well, I calculate I'll make ther lazy peons hustle around that ranch of ourn, jest ther same. But say! I reckon we're both headin' ther same way jest now, so we'll ride along together."

"That's right," retorted Wild. "We don't want to delay too much. Come on, friends."

The party set out along the rough mountain road and the buckboard jolted along with them, Hortense's weight tipping it a little so it was lop-sided.

But the bony horses could easily keep up with the pack-horses, and so they continued until noon.

Then they halted and went into temporary camp to cook dinner and have a rest.

Our friends had not said anything about the bandits, as they did not want to alarm the happy couple who were spending the early part of their honeymoon by riding over the rugged mountains in a buckboard.

It was a little before two in the afternoon when they were ready to start again.

As they rode off Pedro urged his horse to the side of our hero and said:

"Senor Young Wild West, we must turn to the left a mile from here."

"All right," was the reply. "When we get to the right place just let us know."

The spot where they were to part company with Zeke Putnam and his bride was soon reached.

Pedro knew it because he had blazed a tree to mark the spot.

"Well, we are going to turn this way," said our hero to the couple. "I wish you the best of luck, both of you."

"Why don't you come on ter ther ranch with us?" asked the Yankee. "Hortense says it ain't more'n fifteen miles from here."

"We can't just now, I am sorry to say. But we'll give you a call in a few days."

"Do yer mean that, Young Wild West?"

"Yes, I mean it. I wouldn't tell you so if I didn't mean it."

"All right, then. We'll look fur yer. Good-by!"

"Good-by!" cried all hands.

Then they parted company.

Wild found that it was not much of a trail they had to follow.

It was one of the wildest parts of the range, and it looked as though very few travelers had ever been that way.

"You're sure this is ther way, Pedro?" asked the scout, riding alongside the Mexican.

"I a-sure," was the reply. "Dis place where-a da bandits catch me; soldiers come along da road an make a-run."

"All right. I reckon you ought to know."

"I cut-a da trees—see!"

Pedro pointed to a tree that had been recently blazed.

Then they all felt certain that he knew the way.

They pushed along for a little over two hours.

The trail was remarkably good for such a wild and unfrequented spot.

Pedro was nodding and looking around expectantly now.

Suddenly he uttered a cry of delight, and, pointing ahead, exclaimed:

"Me a-see da place where da cave is! Me find all right, Senor West!"

"Good! I am glad we are here. We covered the hundred and forty miles in pretty quick time, I think. Much better than I thought we would do when we started. But the traveling has not been as bad as I thought it would be. Now, then, there is a little stream of water over there. We will make that spot our headquarters, I guess. We mustn't get too close to the cave where the treasure is, for the bandits may follow us and be on the watch. We have got to keep them from knowing where the cave is if we possibly can."

Pedro nodded.

"Da cave about two hundred a-feet from a-jere," he said, as they came to a halt near the stream that trickled from the high rocks above.

It was a very picturesque spot where our friends had chosen to go into camp.

Black and gray rocks loomed up in fantastic shapes on every hand, while a perpendicular cliff that must have been a hundred feet high reared itself straight in front of them.

It was from a jagged split in this that the stream of water came from, and they knew it must be good water.

Firs, pines and dwarfed cedars fringed the rocky proclivities and the different species of shrubbery common to the Mexican Rockies grew in abundance, the berries and blossoms showing up here and there in a manner that was pleasing to the eye.

"Well, I reckon this are about as good a place as we could find fur a campin' spot," Cheyenne Charlie declared. "There's plenty of big rocks around for us to hide behind in case them galoots we struck happen to come along an' give us fight."

"Yes, this place is all right," Wild answered. "Hello! What is that I hear?"

They all heard the sounds of an approaching wagon then, and they looked at each other in surprise.

"It must be Zeke and Hortense," said Arietta, with a smile.

"That is just who it is!" exclaimed our hero, as he caught sight of the buckboard and the bony team approaching. "I wonder what is the matter with that couple, anyhow?"

The outfit soon came up, for the ground was pretty level right there, and the horses had a good chance to get up a gait.

"Whoa!" exclaimed Zeke Putnam, as he pulled up the team. "I calculate you folks is s'prised ter see us, ain't yer?"

"Well, rather," replied Wild. "What's the trouble?"

"Oh, there be no trouble, Mr. West. You see, me an' Hortense jest made up our minds after you left us that we wasn't in no particular hurry ter git ter ther ranch, an' as we'd both took a mighty strong notion ter you folks, we decided putty quick ter foller yer an' try an' git a little of ther pleasure that you're all gittin' a-ridin' around over ther mountains."

"So that is the way it is, eh?"

"Yes, that's jest it. Hortense allowed that we wouldn't be welcome if we come over, but I jest said we would. How about it, Young Wild West?"

"Well, I guess you are welcome, 'all right," our hero answered.

While he did not relish the idea very much of their being with them, he was not the one to say they were not welcome.

Every honest person was welcome to join Young Wild West in his travels.

Arietta, Anna and Eloise were really pleased at the prospect of having the fat Mexican lady for a companion.

She seemed to be a very good-natured person, indeed, and she would no doubt prove quite interesting.

The Yankee began unhitching his horses right away.

"You've struck a fine place ter camp," he said, looking around with a practiced eye. "I reckon it is fun ter travel around this way, especially if you've got your wife or sweet-heart with yer."

"We do not want to interfere with the senor or senoritas," said Hortense, looking at the girls. "We have a big rubber blanket, two woolen ones and cooking utensils and some provisions with us. We shall not bother you at all in that way."

"Oh, you can have anything you want that we don't want to use ourselves," retorted Arietta.

"Thank you. But we have everything that is required. We started out with the intention of camping nights, and we have done so ever since we left El Paso. I have enjoyed it greatly."

The work of putting the camp in shape was now begun.

The two tents were pitched, the horses picketed where they could nibble away at the luxuriant grass, and then all hands prepared to take a rest.

The Yankee had backed his wagon up against the cliff

and his wife gathered a bunch of dry leaves and made their bed under it.

"I reckon that's about as good as your tent," said Zeke, pointing it out to Wild.

"Yes, the buckboard comes in very handy," was the reply.

"Say!" and the Yankee became serious all of a sudden, "do you know there's a place not fur from here what's called Death Divide?"

"No," answered our hero. "Is that a fact?"

"Yes, my wife knows all about it."

"Why is it called Death Divide?"

"Well, she was tellin' me while we was ridin' over that a big battle was fought there somethin' like four hundred years ago between a lot of Spaniards an' Injuns. It's a kinder gully what's filled with big rocks an' it divided ther territory ther Injuns was holdin' from what ther Spaniards had gobbled up. Ther Injuns got ther worst of ther fight an' ther gully was filled with their bodies when it was over. Someone give it ther name of Death Divide an' it still goes by it among ther Mexicans, so Hortense tells me. She says as how there oughter be lots of money buried around here somewhere, as ther Spaniards had plenty of it, an' them what got done ter death by ther Injuns must have planted a good deal of it. S'pose we go an' take a look at Death Divide, jest fur ther fun of it?"

"Very well. Just get the missus to direct us the right way."

Zeke had a short talk with Hortense and then came back.

"It's around this way," he said, pointing in the direction Pedro claimed the cave was located. "Come on, Young Wild West."

Wild followed him, the rest remaining at the camp.

They did not have to go more than a hundred yards when they came to a weird-looking gully that ran along between the hills and cliffs as far as the eye could reach.

"That's ther Death Divide, I calculate," remarked the Yankee.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when half a dozen fierce-looking Mexicans sprang from behind the rocks and seized him and bore him away!

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE YANKEE.

Zeke Putnam no sooner caught sight of the Mexicans than he was seized by them and borne away.

He heard a shot fired, the report sounding so close to him that it rang in his ears, and then, as a yell for help came from his lips, a blanket was flung over his head and he felt himself going downward.

He brought up with a thud and found himself rolling over and over, badly mixed up with three or four men.

He had just succeeded in getting the blanket away from

his face so he could see when the light was shut out and a stygian darkness reigned.

"Thunder!" ejaculated the Yankee.

"Shut-a up!" a low voice hissed in his ear; "make a-some noise and you will a-die!"

Zeke did not want to die just then.

He valued his life as much as any mortal possibly could.

Though he had not the least idea what it all meant, he realized that he had fallen in the hands of a gang of desperadoes.

The Yankee was anything but a coward.

But he could tell by the tone of the voice that the man would probably kill him if he put up any further fight or cried out.

He decided to remain perfectly still.

The next minute he was picked up bodily, and with noiseless footsteps his captors bore him along.

Zeke Putnam had not the least idea where he was, but he did think it strange that Young Wild West did not interfere in his behalf.

But when he got to thinking over this it occurred to him as quick as a flash that it might be that the dashing young fellow had been killed when he heard the report of a revolver as he was seized and whisked away.

A cold shiver passed down the spine of Zeke.

If Young Wild West had been killed there would be little show for him to get away.

In about two minutes from the time he was picked up from the spot where he had fallen in a heap with his captors he was deposited rather roughly on a skin-covered floor, and the blanket, which had been replaced over his head, was removed.

The Yankee looked around him and found that he was in a cave.

The light of day came in from a wide opening on one side, and he could readily see that the cave was fitted out as a sort of rendezvous.

There were even articles of household furniture there, and they seemed strangely out of place.

Though the captive was pretty badly frightened, he became curious when he took in his surroundings.

And when he became curious a certain degree of coolness returned to him.

"What did yer catch me fur?" he asked, as he saw his captors looking at him.

One of them was squatting right near him, a cocked revolver in his hand, and he quickly replied:

"Da Americano no a-like, eh?"

"Of course I don't like it. What did yer catch me fur? I never done nothin' ter you."

At this juncture some more Mexicans came in.

One of them was Don Aguilla, for, as might be supposed, it was the bandit gang that had captured the Yankee.

"What is the matter, senor?" he asked, smiling sarcastically at the prisoner.

"Well, I'd like ter know what you fellers catched me an' brung me here fur?" was the retort.

"Well, I will tell you, senior. I will be truthful with you. There is a treasure hidden somewhere around Death Divide, and we want to find it. I think that you know where it is, and that is why you were captured."

"A treasure!" gasped Zeke, in genuine surprise.

"Yes, a treasure. You know where it is."

"You're wrong, senior. This are ther first time I was ever as fur over ther line as this. I don't know nothin' about a treasure, an' I'll give my guarantee that I don't."

The leader of the bandits looked keenly at the man.

"You know that Young Wild West came here to Death Divide to hunt for the treasure, don't you?" he asked, after a pause.

"Nope!" declared the Yankee. "I never heard a word ther that effect."

"Well, I'll tell you that he came here for that purpose, then. The Mexican with him is leading him. He knows where it is. We saw you and Wild West looking around through Death Divide, and then I said to six of my men: 'Go and capture the American with the whiskers on his chin; he will be made to tell where the treasure is quicker than any of the rest.' They obeyed me! They caught you, but one of them got shot by the boy with the long hair as they were getting out of his sight. Now I want to tell you that, unless you tell where the treasure is, you shall die!"

"I can't tell where it is, 'cause I never knowed there was any treasure around here," replied Zeke, his face turning pale.

"That is what you say now. But you will talk different pretty soon."

"I can't talk any different if you do kill me," said Zeke, despairingly. "How kin a feller tell something that he don't know?"

Don Aguilla smiled sardonically.

"You are lying, like the dog of an American you are!" he exclaimed.

Zeke Putnam was never more frightened in his whole life.

He had experienced all sorts of things while ranching in Texas, but never had he been captured by a band of men who were ready to take his life before.

"Stand the prisoner on his feet," said the captain, speaking to his men in Spanish.

Two of them quickly seized Zeke and lifted him up.

He was turned so he could look out of the opening that let in the light.

The Yankee recoiled when he saw there was naught but a yawning abyss there.

It was not the way the Mexicans had entered the place; he knew that, as he had seen the captain and several others come in through a passage that was to the left of him.

"Move him nearer, so he may see what is below," said Don Aguilla.

Two of the bandits obeyed.

Cold beads of perspiration came out upon his brow and he pulled back coweringly.

"Do you see what is below?" asked the bandit leader in

an icy tone of voice. "Two hundred feet down there is a running stream that loses itself underground. There is where you will be thrown if you do not tell where the treasure is inside of five minutes!"

The speaker took a handsome gold watch from his pocket and looked at it.

For a moment the very blood seemed to freeze in the Yankee's veins.

He tried to say something, but his tongue refused to act.

"It would be a horrible death, would it not?" went on the captain, fiendishly. "But, then, I suppose you would be dead before you struck the stream of water. Two hundred feet is a big drop, and then there are so many rocky crags and projections on the way down that you would be torn into tatters before the bottom was reached, anyhow. Tell where the treasure is buried, or that is surely going to be your fate when the time is up!"

"I—I don't know—know anything about a treasure," gasped the frightened captive. "I can't tell what I know, gosh, if I kin!"

"You can tell, and you will tell, or you will die!"

Zeke would have dropped to the ground if the two Mexicans had not held him up.

A minute of deathly silence followed.

"You had better make up your mind," said Don Aguilla, his brows contracting.

"I can't tell what I don't know!" repeated Zeke, despairingly.

"You are lying, and you know it."

"I ain't! I ain't!" shouted the captive, in terror.

"Stop that shouting," commanded one of the men who had hold of him, thrusting the point of a dagger against his forehead.

"Let me go!" pleaded the captive, becoming strangely calm. "If yer do I'll git Young Wild West ter tell where ther treasure is, if he knows. I don't know; they never said a word about it ter me. You said ther feller named Pedro was leadin' 'em ter where it is. Why don't yer git hold of him an' make him tell?"

"You are just as obstinate as the rest of your race!" exclaimed Don Aguilla, not noticing a word of what Zeke said. "The time is up! You shall die!"

"Oh! Oh!" groaned the captive, trembling from head to foot.

"But wait!" said the captain, as a sudden thought struck him. "Men, fetch the body of Caspar, who was shot by Young Wild West. We will consign it to the mysteries of the depths below. And as it strikes the underground stream the dog of an American shall start on his descent to certain death."

Zeke's teeth chattered like castanets.

He turned as he heard the villains approaching with the body.

It had been wrapped in a blanket ready for burial.

He could see that it was the form of a human being.

The Mexicans took off their hats while the captain re-

cited a very short burial service in Spanish, and then at a word from him the body was launched over the cliff.

There was a silence until a faint splash was heard far below.

Then Don Aguilla gripped the Yankee by the collar.

"You have one more chance," he said, with a hiss. "Tell where the treasure is!"

Zeke shook his head, for he could no longer speak, so great was his terror.

"Over with the American dog!" said Don Aguilla. "If he cannot tell us what we want to know he shall go to avenge the death of Caspar!"

There was a quick scuffle, a long-drawn cry of despair and then Zeke Putnam was hurled over the cliff, his hands bound behind him. He had not a vestige of a chance to save himself.

The fiends did not listen for the splash, but broke into a faint cheer to show their satisfaction at what their leader had caused to be done.

"Not too loud, men," said Don Aguilla. "There may be listening ears about. Young Wild West will surely look for the man, and he may be close by."

"But he can never get here, Captain," answered one of the bandits, "unless he should lower himself down with a lariat and swing into the cave. He cannot find the secret passage."

The leader shook his head.

"I have an idea that he is a persistent fellow," he said. "We cannot be too careful. I will pay a visit to the entrance of the passage and listen."

As he finished speaking he turned and walked around an angle of rock and entered a dark passage, or gallery if might be called, as it was both broad and wide.

He walked along this for a couple of hundred feet and then came to a number of horses that were standing in rudely formed stalls.

Right here a stream of light came in from a rift in the natural roof of the cave and objects were plainly discernible.

Don Aguilla cast a fleeting glance at the horses belonging to the band.

They were all right and munching away at their fodder contentedly.

He continued on, turning sharply to the left, and a few feet farther on came to a stop, because he could proceed no further.

A smooth slab of rock was right in front of him, slanting toward him, and attached to it, through holes that had been drilled, were ropes which ran over a beam that was just above his head.

Don Aguilla looked the ropes over carefully and gave a nod.

"Everything works as nice as can be," he said to himself.

"It was a great find when we struck this underground hiding-place. And it was so easy to rig this big slab in position to conceal the entrance. One push on the lever

by a man and down comes the slab, and a pull makes it go up again! The horses can get in and out with the greatest ease, too. I think that big slab was formed by nature just on purpose for us. It only took three days to get it ready to go in place."

After listening a few minutes and hearing nothing the captain of the bandits turned and walked back.

As he reached the point where the opening in the roof was directly above him he heard a suspicious sound.

Looking up, he was astonished to see a pair of legs dropping through the opening.

Don Aguilla stepped quickly behind one of the horses.

"Carramba!" he exclaimed under his breath. "One of the Americans has climbed to the top of the pile of rocks and located our cave through the rift. I hope it is Young Wild West."

Down came the feet and lower portions of a human body, and two seconds later Don Aguilla beheld Young Wild West descending by means of a rope!

The leader of the bandits crouched behind the horse ready to spring.

Down came the boy until his feet rested upon the stone floor of the cave.

Then, just as he let go of the rope, Don Aguilla pounced upon him with the quickness of a tiger and bore him to the floor!

CHAPTER V.

WILD IS CAUGHT NAPPING.

Young Wild West was not expecting anything like it when the Mexicans appeared so suddenly and seized Zeke Putnam.

But as they darted around a big rock with him he jerked out his revolver and fired.

He just had time to see one of the scoundrels drop forward and then they all disappeared from his sight.

The dashing young deadshot was not going to be caught in a trap, so he quickly ran behind a neighboring boulder and waited to see if the Mexicans would appear and give him battle.

But not a sound was to be heard that would indicate there was anyone near him.

"It is mighty funny where they could have gone to," he muttered.

Just then he heard hurried footsteps coming from the direction of the camp.

He looked around and saw Cheyenne Charlie approaching.

"What's ther matter, Wild?" the scout called out. "We heard a revolver-shot, an' I thought somethin' might be wrong."

"There is something wrong, Charlie," replied the boy.

"Where's ther Downeaster?"

"That's what I would like to know."

"Great gimlets! He didn't fall over a cliff or somethin', did he?"

"He didn't fall over a cliff, but half a dozen Mexicans jumped from behind the rocks over there an' whipped him out of sight before I hardly knew what was taking place. I winged one of them just as they were getting around that pile of rocks over there."

"An' where are they now?"

"I don't know. I listened, but couldn't even hear their footsteps as they ran away. It's a sort of puzzle to me, Charlie."

"Well, I'm goin' to see if they're hidin' behind them rocks."

The scout moved around to the right and presently reached a point where he could take a peep in that direction.

But there was not the least sign of a human being to be seen there.

"There ain't no one around there," said Charlie, as he moved over to the spot.

Wild followed him and found that he told the truth.

Our hero shook his head.

"This is something I can't understand," he said. "I am completely stumped. There is no place that they could have got in to hide, so where did they go?"

The scout shrugged his shoulders.

"I reckon ther measly coyotes belonged to ther bandit gang, didn't they?" he asked.

"Yes, I am quite sure of that."

"Then they've got a hidin'-place right close around here somewheres."

"You are right, I guess. It must be a secret place, and it must be very close by, too, or they could never have vanished so quickly."

"Well, Wild, I reckon we've found sich places afore, ain't we?"

"We certainly have, Charlie."

"Well, I guess we oughter find this here one, then."

"Well, let's hurry up about it, then. It is too bad that Putnam got caught by them. He was a little ahead of me, and I suppose if I had been where he was it would have been me."

"Maybe they wouldn't have got hold of you so easy."

"I don't know about that. It was a complete surprise to me; there's no rubbing that out."

"I wonder how ther Downeaster's big, fat Mexican wife will take it when she hears he's gobbled up by ther bandits?"

Charlie grinned when he said this.

If there was a humorous side to anything he was pretty sure to find it.

They made a diligent search about the vicinity, but could find nothing that looked like the entrance to a hiding-place of any sort.

Young Wild West was convinced that there was one there, though.

The more he thought of what had happened the more sure he was on that point.

The ground was so rocky around there that it would have been impossible for the Mexicans to have got away without his hearing their footfalls.

After awhile he decided to climb upon the mass of rocks that nature had piled up in the form of a cone right where the Yankee had been captured.

"I reckon they didn't git up there, Wild," said the scout, as the boy began working his way to the top.

Wild paid no attention to what his companion said, but kept on working his way around to get a hold so he could draw himself up further.

The top of the natural cone was not more than twelve feet high.

But the rocks were so smooth and of such shape that it was difficult to get up there.

But Wild managed it after awhile.

Just as he got there he heard what seemed to be a despairing cry, and he thought he recognized the voice of Zeke Putnam.

Charlie heard it, too, and he looked at Wild questioningly.

They both listened, but could hear no more.

"It might have been the death-cry of Putnam," thought our hero. "But I hope not. I hardly think the villains are bad enough to kill him in cold blood."

Wild sat there and listened for perhaps five minutes.

Then he began crawling over the top of the bunch of rocks.

It covered a space of probably thirty square feet, and the cracks between them were so many that he had to be careful lest he should slip down and become wedged between them.

Pretty soon he came to a crack that was wide enough for him to look down, and when he did look he saw that he was over a cave.

But that was not all he saw!

In the dim light that was let in through the opening he could see a number of horses below!

A thrill shot through the boy.

That he had discovered the hiding-place of the bandits he felt certain.

Charlie stood below watching him expectantly.

He could tell right away by our hero's actions that he had made a discovery.

Wild beckoned to him.

He did not want to run the risk of calling out, as there might be someone below who would hear him.

The scout quickly ran to the cone-shaped pile.

"Get a lariat, Charlie—quick!" whispered the boy, leaning over. "I have found the place where the bandits took Putnam."

"Great gimlets!" ejaculated Charlie.

"Hurry, now!"

Away went the scout for the camp.

He was not gone long.

And when he came back he had a lariat.

He flung it up to our hero and then proceeded to work his way up to him.

Wild let him take hold of the lariat, and that helped him.

Once at the crack the scout looked down.

He gave a nod.

"I reckon we know somethin' now," he whispered.

"Yes. I am going down there. I want you to let me down with the lariat."

"All right, Wild."

"I'll take the chances that the horses are the only living things right below. The Mexicans are in some other part of the cavern, most likely."

"Yes, I reckon so. But take a good look an' make sure afore yer go down."

Wild did take a good look.

The coast was clear, as far as he could see.

Thrusting his feet through the opening, he began to gradually let himself down.

Charlie let the rope down easily and noiselessly.

As he was holding the weight of the boy he was in such a position that he could not look down.

But the instant he felt the rope slacken he knew Wild had reached the floor of the cave.

Then he leaned over and looked down.

To his surprise and dismay, he saw a man holding him by the throat upon the ground!

It was light enough for the scout to see that it was a Mexican.

He looked around for a convenient place to make the lariat fast just as a low whistle sounded from below.

He found a place to get the rope around and then he quickly knotted it.

But it took him some seconds to do this, and when he again took the risk of peering down into the cave he saw half a dozen of the Mexicans there.

The whistle had called them there in a hurry.

Charlie was sensible enough not to go down just then.

He knew he would stand little show if he did.

He waited.

"There's only one way ter help Wild," he thought, "an' that is ter slide down ther rope as soon as they start away from there with him. Then I might be able ter find ther way they git in an' out of ther cave, an' after that I'll have ter work strategy ter git him away from 'em."

Charlie had not told anyone but Jim what had happened when he went to the camp for the lariat.

He advised Jim to stay there, and if he did not hear anything from them in fifteen minutes to take a walk to the cone-shaped pile of rocks.

The scout knew if he went down that Jim would not be long in discovering the lariat, for it was wound around a rock that was in plain view.

He saw the Mexicans pick up the struggling form of our hero and bear him away.

The very instant the last one was out of sight he dropped through the narrow opening and began to go down.

Luck was with him, it seemed, for he reached the bottom of the cave without coming in contact with any of the Mexicans.

But the next instant he heard hurried footsteps approaching.

Charlie quickly dropped back in the shadow behind one of the horses.

He was none too soon, for the next instant one of the bandits appeared.

That he had been sent back to keep an eye on the opening above was evident, for he took hold of the rope and shook it, holding a revolver in his hand at the same time.

Charlie could see him pretty well, as he was standing right under the place where the light was admitted to the cave.

Again the desperado shook the rope.

Then he looked and listened.

But as he heard or saw nothing, he was plainly satisfied that Young Wild West had been alone.

Two minutes later the Mexican walked over to the secret entrance of the cave, and, after listening intently for a minute, lifted the lever and allowed the big slab of stone to drop.

It so happened that the scout was in a direct line with the short passage, and he could see exactly what the man was doing, especially when a flood of light came in through the opening.

Charlie gave a nod of satisfaction.

"I reckon I know how he done that," he thought. "He jest pushed up on that stick and down come ther big rock. It's quite a contrivance. No wonder we couldn't find no openin'."

The Mexican let the slab all the way down and went outside.

In a couple of minutes he came in, nodding with satisfaction.

"I reckon he didn't go out far enough ter see ther rope where it is tied," muttered the scout under his breath.

The bandit now pressed upon the lever and the slab was forced into place again.

Charlie grinned with delight.

"I guess I kin do that little trick," he chuckled; "jest wait!"

The bandit now started for the cave that opened over the abyss.

Charlie knew that he was going to report, but he had no idea just what kind of a place it was where the band had their headquarters.

He waited till the man was out of sight and then came from behind the horse.

He had just made up his mind to steal along in the direction Wild had been taken when back came two men.

They walked right past him as he crouched behind the horse again and both entered the passage.

They listened for a moment and then let the big slab drop.

Then one of them went out cautiously.

He was gone about ten minutes and then down dropped the lariat!

The scout shrugged his shoulders.

There would be no chance of Jim seeing the lariat now.

The Mexican came back and then the entrance was closed, after which they made their way into the main cave again.

With a determination to do or die, Cheyenne Charlie stealthily followed them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WONDERFUL ESCAPE OF THE YANKEE.

Strange things happen occasionally, and one of the very strangest happened when Zeke Putnam, the Yankee, was thrown over the cliff by the Mexican bandits.

The poor fellow thought his last moment on earth had arrived, and no wonder. Had he not heard the body of the slain man strike the dark, rushing water two hundred feet below?

But Zeke did not fall down the abyss into the rushing water.

He did not fall more than thirty feet, and then, as his body turned over, it struck a cedar tree that grew out from the face of the cliff.

This saved the man, for it whirled him over and swung him into a net-work of vines that were firmly rooted between the rocks.

How it was he never knew, but one of his feet got caught and there he hung, head down!

A hope that was born of despair came into the heart of the Yankee.

He had not dropped down into the rushing water so many feet below!

That meant that there was a chance for him to live.

It seemed that a kind Providence had been instrumental in making that cedar bush interfere with the descent of the helpless man.

With his hands tied behind him he hung there, swinging like a pendulum, his back scraping against the jagged rocks that were as sharp as the edge of an ax in some places.

But it was a very good thing for him that the rocks were pointed and sharp there.

In some manner the rope, which was a very old and thin one, that held his wrists together came in contact with one of the sharp places, and the first thing he knew his hands were free.

"Oh, the thrill of joy that shot through Zeke Putnam's frame!

His quivering hands caught hold of the tough vine and he began pulling himself up.

He looked up and saw that the main root of the vine he was clinging to was not in sight.

The vine hung over a little ledge, and that was right in his reach.

Courage came to him now with full force.

"I ain't goin' ter die jest yet, anyhow," he muttered. "Oh, them scoundrels! Ter throw me over ther cliff like that! But I'll git ther best of 'em yet! I'm goin' ter live!"

He began to slowly pull himself upward, for he did not want to dislodge the roots of the vine.

It was easy enough to disentangle his foot that had caught in the net-work as he got up a little.

His weight not pulling upon it gave him the chance.

Up went the man who was making such a desperate battle to save his life.

Gradually he worked himself upon a narrow ledge that was barely wide enough to hold him.

Once there he sat down and rested.

He looked upward, but found that the mouth of the bandits' cave thrust itself outward several feet, and thus he could not see it.

"I must have swung in putty good ter hit that cedar," he muttered. "Well, it saved my life, fur if it had not been fur it I'd be as dead as a mackerel now, an' it's mighty hard ter tell where my body would be."

Zeke was getting cooler all the time now.

When he had remained seated on the little ledge for the space of five minutes he concluded that it was time for him to try and get back to the camp and see what had become of Young Wild West.

He was certain that the boy was all right, and that he was even now searching for him.

He looked on both sides of him carefully, and when he found that to the left of him the ledge broadened considerable he nodded and gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

He wiped the cold beads of perspiration from his forehead and then proceeded to make his way to the left.

In another minute he was on a space that was amply broad enough for him to stand up.

Nerving himself, he got upon his feet.

He took care not to attempt to look downward.

Just then it might have been disastrous to him to do that.

Physically and mentally he was not in the best of shape just then.

Zeke walked along the ledge to a sharp turn, and then holding fast to a projection of rock, he saw another ledge that sloped upward to a comparatively level spot that overlooked the rocky gully that was called Death Divide.

It would be extremely dangerous to get around the sharp turn, since there was absolutely nothing but a smooth wall of rock for him to hold fast to.

But he was rendered desperate, and under the conditions

he could do more than he could if he had simply been placed there to try the feat.

"I'm goin' ter git around there," muttered Zeke. "If I kin I'll be all right."

He waited a moment and then thrust his left foot around the sharp angle and got it firmly placed on the ledge.

Then by a quick effort he let himself go around.

Though he came within an ace of losing his balance, he landed all right.

Once more Zeke Putnam sat down.

The worst of it was over now, and he knew it, but still it had weakened him so that he was almost as helpless as a little child.

For ten minutes he sat there, gradually pulling himself together.

When he finally arose to his feet and started up the narrow slope he walked as steadily as though nothing had happened.

Up he went for probably a hundred feet, and then he suddenly found himself looking upon the place that had been named by the Mexicans as Death Divide.

It was right before him, and half a dozen steps down and he would be in the rocky gully.

The Yankee had been brought up by pious parents, and he lifted his eyes and breathed a silent prayer for his safe deliverance from what had seemed to be a certain death.

Zeke stepped down upon the rocks and began walking from one to another.

He knew the direction to take, but he was afraid to pass the spot where he had been captured by the Mexicans.

So he simply crossed the gully and got upon a hill at the other side.

Rounding this, he looked around and almost the first thing his eyes rested upon was a column of smoke that was rising from a point some fifty yards away.

"That's ther camp!" exclaimed the Yankee, under his breath. "I calculate that I'd better git there as soon as possible."

He started for it, and in a very few minutes had worked his way around in sight the camp.

Jim Dart was walking up and down uneasily when he caught sight of the Yankee approaching.

"Hello!" called out Jim. "Where have you been?"

"Where's Young Wild West?" was the retort, as Zeke rushed up.

It so happened that Charlie had just left with the lariat, and though they imagined that something was wrong, none of the rest knew what the trouble was.

"Wild is close by with Charlie," answered Dart. "I guess I'll go and tell them that you are here. They are looking for you."

"Well, I'm alive, but it's a miracle!" exclaimed Zeke, as he sat down by his wife and buried his face in his hands.

Jim did not wait to hear him tell his story.

But the man gave a hurried account of what had happened to him, and his hearers were amazed.

The cowboys immediately got up and hurried to where Jim had gone.

"Da bad-a Mexicans catch a-you?" asked Pedro, looking very much disturbed.

"Yes. They said as how I knowed where a treasure was somewhere around here, an' 'cause I couldn't tell 'em where it was they chucked me over ther cliff."

But while the Yankee was relating his extraordinary adventures let us follow Jim Dart and see what he found.

When Jim got to the place Charlie had told him of he could not see a sign of a human being there.

Things had worked in such a way that the Mexican had come out of the cave and removed the lariat from the cone-shaped pile of rocks just as Zeke was working his way for the camp.

Jim was puzzled.

"Hey, Charlie!" he called out softly.

There was no response.

He did not want to shout for fear he might spoil some plan the scout had in view, so he simply began to make a search of the vicinity.

But neither Wild nor Charlie were to be found.

"It is mighty funny," mused Jim. "According to what Charlie said, this is the place."

He was looking right at the top of the cone-shaped pile, and if the lariat had been left there he would surely have seen it.

But as he looked up he suddenly saw something else.

He beheld a knife lying almost at the top!

It was not Wild's nor Charlie's either, and that made him become interested at once.

It was a Mexican's knife that Jim saw, and he knew it.

He decided to go up there and get it, for the mere sight of it suggested that something had happened to both his partners.

Dart began working his way to the top of the rocks right away.

He was careful not to make any more noise than was necessary in doing it.

Once at the top Jim picked up the knife.

There was no blood on it, so he knew it had not been used in a fight.

It was quite likely that the bandit who had gone up to cut the lariat had left the knife there in his hurry to get back to the cave.

But Jim had no idea of any such a thing as this.

He crawled around over the rough and uneven surface and soon discovered the opening that both Charlie and Wild had gone through.

He peered down and saw the horses.

Then it occurred to him instantly that he was right over the headquarters of the band of Mexicans, and that Charlie and Wild were down there.

He dropped flat upon his stomach and took a good look down below.

But there was nothing living to be seen there except the horses.

"I suppose Wild went down and got caught and then Charlie went down to look for him," thought the boy, striking the nail right on the head.

"But where is the lariat Charlie came and got?" he asked himself after a pause. "There is something mighty queer about this business."

For ten minutes Jim waited.

Then he suddenly saw a shadow flit across the cave.

Instantly he was all attention.

The next moment he beheld two forms move cautiously along beneath him.

His heart gave a sudden bound.

If he was not dreaming he saw Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie!

At first he was going to call out to them, but a second convinced him that he would be making a great mistake by doing anything like that.

He saw the two disappear and then all was still.

But one minute later the cave became suddenly lighter.

Jim could not imagine what caused this.

But, hearing a noise at the foot of the rocky hill, he raised his head and looked down.

There stood Wild and Charlie as large as life!

"Thunder!" ejaculated Dart.

Then he slid down with amazing quickness.

"Well, this beats all!" he articulated, as he saw his partners standing before a wide opening in the ground.

"I'll——"

At that moment he tread upon a flat stone which sank a little beneath his weight.

And as it sank the mouth of the cave became suddenly closed.

"Jim, you've found ther way ter shut ther stone door of ther cave from ther outside!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie.

"That was what was puzzlin' me."

Wild seized Jim's hand.

"I guess I would have had a hard time of it if Charlie had not got to me and cut me loose," he said. "But poor Zeke Putnam is dead and gone!"

"No, he isn't, Wild," was the quick reply. "He's safe in the camp."

"What!"

Our hero looked at him in astonishment.

"Why, I heard Don Aguilla, the bandit leader, say that he had him thrown over the precipice which is over there," and he pointed out the direction.

"Well, so he was, but he didn't get killed. Come on to the camp."

CHAPTER VII.

THE BANDITS ARE OUTWITTED.

When Young Wild West was seized and carried through the passage he made up his mind that he was in a tight box.

He struggled to break loose from his captors, but, finding it was no use, he remained quiet and took things calmly.

The bandits carried him into the main cave, where they had taken Zeke Putnam.

Wild's hands were bound behind him, while three of the villains stood before him with leveled pistols.

"Well, you caught me napping, I guess," he said, as they lifted him to his feet. "Now that you've got me, what are you going to do with me?"

"The young senor acts as though he is not much afraid," answered Don Aguilla, stepping forward. "But let me tell you something! The man you are looking for has been thrown over the cliff there, and where his body now is no one knows, for there is a swiftly-running stream that flows underground two hundred feet below. First the body of the man you shot was thrown over, and then came the man—your friend with the chin-whiskers. There is where you are to go, Young Wild West!"

"Oh, I guess you won't throw me over the cliff," said Wild, calmly looking the villain in the eyes. "It would not be healthy for you to do anything like that. You had better make up your mind to give me my liberty and give it to me quick, too!"

"Carramba!" exclaimed Don Aguilla; "you talk like a fool, boy."

"Well, you will find out that I am not a fool before you get through with me."

As he saw nothing of the Yankee, Wild really believed that the scoundrels had thrown him over the cliff.

The leader of the villainous band now gave the word for the men to take Wild to the edge of the precipice and let him look below.

They did so, and though he was fearful lest they might push him over, the daring boy never showed it.

"Nica place to a-fall down," observed one of the Mexicans.

"Fetch him back here," said Don Aguilla. "I am going to give him time to think it over. I am going to let him have just half an hour to make up his mind whether he wants to be thrown over the cliff."

This was spoken in Spanish, but when he had ordered Wild to be bound securely about the ankles and placed in a dark corner near the passage, he proceeded to tell him in English.

"All right," answered Wild, when he understood that he must either tell where the treasure was or die; "I'll think over it, Don Aguilla. But, in the first place, I have never seen the treasure, so I don't know just where it is."

"I think you will know by the time the half hour is up, Senor Young Wild West," retorted the captain of the bandits, smiling sardonically. "I am quite sure that the man we tossed down into the abyss did not know where the treasure is located, but we let him go, anyhow, just to make it even for the man we lost when we captured him. I am very much obliged to you coming here, Senor West; you

could not have done anything that would have pleased me more."

Without another word the villain turned on his heel and left our hero to his own reflections.

Though some of the men went past him two or three times, they never paid the least attention to him.

It was a secluded corner near the passage that led out to the stable and entrance of the cave that Wild had been placed in.

The bandit captain no doubt thought that it would be best to leave him to his own reflections for awhile.

That would give him a chance to think it over, and he would be more apt to give in.

Wild was in an uneasy frame of mind.

He did not know exactly where the treasure cave was, since Pedro had not yet taken him to it.

Nor could he swear that there was a cave with anything in it.

He only had the Mexican's word for it.

But he felt quite certain that the bandits would not hesitate to send him to his death, though.

He was out of the United States now, and the Mexicans had no fear.

They were outlaws in their own land, so what did they care about any other?

But Young Wild West was not to be left to his own reflections very long.

It was not more than five minutes after Don Aguilla left him before two of the Mexicans passed him as they came from the part of the underground retreat where he had been seized and made a prisoner.

They scowled at him, but said nothing.

One of them was the fellow who had first arrived to assist the captain.

These two had no sooner got into the lighted cave that opened on the brink of the abyss when our hero felt a light touch on his shoulder.

He was too well trained to say anything, or give vent to surprise.

But he turned his head slowly and then found the face of Cheyenne Charlie right close to his!

Neither of them ventured to even whisper.

They were too close to the bandits in the cave to risk it.

But the scout lost no time in getting to work at severing Wild's bonds.

The boy had the use of his hands and limbs in less than two seconds.

Then Charlie stepped back in the gloom of the passage.

Wild did not need to be told, and his rescuer knew it.

He cast a look at the lighted cave so close by, and, noticing that only two of the Mexicans could be seen, and they both had their backs to him, he turned over and got upon his hands and knees.

Then he crawled noiselessly into the passage.

"Come on, Wild!" said the scout, in a low whisper, as they were out of sight of the bandits.

Wild got upon his feet.

"I am very glad you happened along before they got ready to throw me over the cliff at the mouth of the cave," he answered in a whisper.

"Jest come right along; I know how ter git out of ther cave."

Straight past the horses they went and then into the short passage where the concealed entrance was.

Charlie knew just what to do.

He found the lever without any trouble, and, catching hold of it, pushed upward.

Down came the slab of stone, much to the surprise of our hero.

But he made no comment just then.

He wanted to get outside.

"Come on!" exclaimed the scout, in a low tone.

Out they went.

And then they met Jim Dart, as has already been described.

The closing of the place was rather mysterious, but before acting on Dart's advice to come on to the camp, they made an examination and discovered that the rock Jim had stepped upon was connected with the lever inside the cave.

By stepping upon it the slab would rise.

"There must be a way to open it from the outside, too," our hero remarked. "How about this stone?"

He stepped upon one, which was so close against a bank of dirt that no one would possibly have bothered it, unless by accident, and then, to his satisfaction, the slab went down.

"I guess we know all about it now," he said, placing his foot upon the other stone and closing the entrance. "Now we'll go over to the camp. I am surprised, and glad, too, to know that Zeke Putnam is all right."

The three lost no time in getting back to the cave.

Exclamations of delight came from all hands as they came up.

"What happened to you in Death Divide, Wild?" Arietta asked.

"A whole lot, Et," was the reply.

Then, while his partners kept a strict watch for the appearance of the bandits, he related just what had occurred.

Charlie and Jim then told the parts they had played, and everybody looked amazed.

"It must be a wonderful cave the bandits have," said Arietta.

"Well, the secret entrance is one of the best things in its line I ever saw," retorted our hero. "It is very simply arranged, too, I suppose."

The Yankee, who was still pale from the ordeal he had been through, shrugged his shoulders and said:

"I guess I don't want nothin' more ter do with them bandits, fur if I do have they'll make short work of me ther next time. It was an out an' out miracle that saved me, an' there be no mistake about it!"

"You should consider yourself a very lucky man, Zeke," remarked Wild.

"I do," was the quick reply. "You kin bet your pile on that!"

"Zeke," said his wife, looking at the buckboard, "it would be better for us to go on to the ranch."

"What!" exclaimed the Yankee. "An' let them bandits come along an' rob us afore we got there? I calculate that we're safer here than anywhere else jest now."

Then he stepped over and whispered in her ear:

"Young Wild West an' his friends is here after a treasure that's in a cave. We might as well stay an' see what it is."

The face of the Mexican woman brightened.

"A treasure!" she answered. "How do you know?"

"Well, didn't I tell you how ther bandits was tryin' ter make me tell where it was?"

"Yes; I believe you are right. I will ask one of the girls about it."

Our friends had a pretty good idea of what the whispered conversation meant, for the next minute Hortense looked over at Wild and said:

"We will stay here with you if you will go over to our ranch with us when we are done here."

"Well, we promised to call at the ranch before we left Mexico," retorted our hero. "But if you think you are running into danger by staying here you had better go on. I think you will get to your destination in safety. There is going to be a lively time of it before we leave the Death Divide, as I intend to clean out this gang of bandits."

The woman looked as though she was undecided as to what to do about it.

Finally she turned to Arietta and asked:

"What about the treasure you came to find?"

"I know nothing about it," was the quick reply. "None of us will know until it is found, and that may never be."

"Don't think that I am anxious to get a share of it," said Hortense, apologetically; "I am simply interested, that is all. I have often heard my people say that there was supposed to be vast treasures buried in the vicinity of the place called Death Divide. The gold and silver was buried here by the Aztecs when the Spaniards conquered Mexico."

Wild heard the conversation, and he thought he might as well let them know just what they had come to Mexico for.

So he told Zeke Putnam and his Mexican wife the story of Pedro, cutting it as short as possible.

"We felt pretty sure of meeting with some adventures whether we found the treasure cave or not," he concluded.

"And I guess we have found out that our expectations were not out of the way. Look at what has happened already!"

"Well, I hope you are able to drive the bandits away and then find the treasure," Hortense hastened to reply.

"I calculate that you're ther one ter do it, Young Wild West," added Zeke, his eyes sparkling, as he thought of the

untold wealth they might unearth. "I'm willin' ter help yer all I kin."

"All right," was Wild's reply.

Our hero was in no particular hurry to get into the cave where Pedro had discovered the ancient gold coins.

He thought it best to get rid of the bandits first.

That the Mexican authorities were looking for them was pretty certain from what Pedro had said.

But he did not want the authorities to know what they had come to that wild part of the mountains for.

That meant that they must get rid of the bandits without the help of anyone belonging to that country.

Wild thought it over for awhile and came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to imprison the rascals in ther cave.

He spoke to Charlie and Jim about it, and they agreed with him.

So, taking a couple of the cowboys with them, they went over to the hidden entrance and tried to find a way to seal it.

But it was a hard problem, since the slab opened on the inside.

"I reckon it would be a good idea ter put three or four of us here ter shoot ther galoots when they try ter come out," said Trusty Jerry.

"Is all of ther gang here what we met yisterday?" asked one of the cowboys.

"Yes," answered our hero.

"Well, there's twenty-three of 'em, then."

"No, for I dropped one of them as they ran off with the Yankee and got inside the cave."

"Well, that leaves twenty-two. We kin take care of that crowd, I reckon."

But Wild decided to block up the entrance to the cave.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARIETTA DISAPPEARS.

"Go and get a pick and shovel from the camp, Jerry," said Wild to the foreman of the cowboys. "I have thought of a way to fix the Mexicans. When they get out it will be when they surrender and come out one at a time with their hands above their heads."

"All right," was the reply, and Trusty Jerry hastened to do the errand.

He soon got back with the implements, and then under the direction of our hero an excavation was made under the shifting stone that caused the slab to drop.

It was soon discovered that the stone was simply bound to a rough piece of timber that went down in the ground to the cave.

When the slab went down the log and stone went with it.

"I guess we'll fix it so they'll have trouble in getting their door to work," observed our hero, as he tied the end

of a lariat about the log. "Now, Charlie, just make that fast to that rock over there, so the stone can't possibly go down."

The scout hastened to do this.

"I don't suppose that will keep them from getting out," went on Wild, "but it will certainly make them destroy the mechanism before they are able to drop the slab, and when they do that they won't be able to get it up again, unless they use main strength."

"An' we kin keep a watch an' see when they come out," said Charlie. "We kin nail 'em as fast as they come."

"That's it!" exclaimed the cowboys in unison.

It was now near sunset.

As the orb of day slowly sank behind a distant peak it suggested naught but peace and quietness.

The slanting rays fell upon a jagged cliff that had a sprinkling of quartz rock along its face, and this glittered like a display of diamonds.

That sunset in the mountains of Mexico was truly a beautiful sight, but Young Wild West and his friends had other things to think about.

Many were the beautiful sunsets they had looked upon, but very few times had they realized it.

They were always too busy to get sentimental.

And, besides, too much of a thing makes it commonplace.

In a few minutes the slab was fixed so it could not be lowered without removing the log, and as this was tied from the outside, it would take the bandits some little time to do it.

Then Wild appointed Trusty Jerry and one of the other cowboys to remain close by and watch the spot, and they went back to the camp.

The girls were cooking the evening meal when they got there, and it can be safely said that the appetites of Wild and the rest needed no sharpening for it.

Pedro had pointed out the cave where he had made his wonderful discovery—or rather about where it was located—but Wild had not seen anything that looked like a cave, other than the one occupied by the bandits, as yet.

He decided to pay a visit to the spot in company of the Mexican after it got good and dark.

As soon as supper was eaten the two on watch were relieved.

They reported that they had not seen or heard anything of the bandits.

Wild thought it a little strange that this should be the case, but he said nothing.

He felt sure that the bandits would be expecting trouble after they found out he had escaped.

And they surely must have discovered it shortly after he got away with Charlie.

Darkness had now come and the mountain scenery was wrapped in the shadows.

Wild got a lantern from the supplies they had brought with them, and, turning to Pedro, said:

"I guess you and I will take a little walk."

"Si, senor," was the reply.

"Never mind the Spanish lingo; you can talk United States good enough. Just stick to that, please."

"All a-right, Mister West," and the Mexican grinned.

"That's better. Now, come on."

Everybody in the camp had an idea what Wild was up to, but as he said nothing of it they did not question him. When Pedro was ready the two started off.

"I want you to lead me to the treasure cave, Pedro."

"All a-right."

"But I don't want you to go direct to it. Take a course that is a little roundabout."

"I understand."

"You've got your bearings all right, haven't you?" asked Wild.

"You a-mean I know where da cave is?"

"Yes, that's it."

"I a-know dat."

"All right, then. Don't go straight to it, but we'll go around. It may be that the bandits have some other way of getting in and out of the cave and they might be spying on us."

Pedro declared that he understood.

He led the way around a hill, crossed a gully and then ascended a wooded slope.

At the top of this Wild found that he had a good view of the place known as Death Divide.

Pedro, who was upon his hands and knees, suddenly touched Wild on the arm and whispered:

"Here da cave."

He lifted up a bunch of trailing vines as he spoke and showed a dark opening that was large enough for a man to walk into by stooping a little.

Our hero took a good look in the place before he made a move to enter it.

"Are you sure this is the right place, Pedro?" he asked.

"Yas, me a-sure," was the reply.

"Well, go on in, then; I'll follow you."

Unhesitatingly the Mexican walked in.

Wild held the vines aside until he had passed and then followed.

"Light-a da lantern," whispered Pedro.

Wild thought he could risk doing it, since the vines had dropped back into place, concealing the entrance, so he struck a match and did so.

Then he saw that there were evidences of the handiwork of man there.

Toward the rear of the cave, which was probably twenty feet deep, was a stone slab resting on a block of stone that was curiously carved.

On this lay a big metal vase that was overturned, and as our hero pressed forward he saw that there was a lot of gold coins lying amid a lot of dirt and refuse.

He realized that the Mexican had adhered strictly to the truth in the story he told about the cave.

"Pedro, I guess there is plenty of money here," he said.

"But don't get excited; we'll take what we can find and

go back to the camp with it. Then to-morrow we'll come back and make a thorough examination of the cave."

"Young Wild West a-know what to a-do," was the reply, while Pedro rolled his eyes and looked delighted, much the same as a child does on a Christmas morning when beholding a well-filled stocking.

Wild was used to all sorts of surprises, and he did not get the least bit worked up over the extraordinary find.

He examined some of the gold coins by the light of the lantern and found they were identical with the one Pedro had shown him.

He handed the lantern to his companion and then coolly began stuffing the coins in his pockets.

"This is pretty weighty stuff, Pedro," he said. "Just put some of it in your pockets. I hate to see it lying around here like this."

Pedro obeyed, and between the two of them they managed to stow away all the coins that could be seen.

"This will do for to-night," said Wild, in a whisper. "I guess we'll go back now."

Wild was afraid the light from the lantern might be seen by their enemies, for the more he thought that it was possible for the bandits to leave their cave by some other way than the hidden entrance the more he was convinced that such was the case.

Pedro was just as willing to leave the cave as he was, for the Mexican was thinking of what happened to him when he was last at the treasure trove.

In his hurry to get outside Pedro forgot that he was carrying a lighted lantern.

He stepped out with it, almost staggering under the weight of the gold coins he had in his pockets.

"Put out the light!" exclaimed our hero, in a low tone.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the report of a rifle rang out and the globe of the lantern was smashed, the light going out at the same time.

"Ah!" exclaimed Wild; "so they are around, are they? Well, Pedro, just make a beeline for the camp!"

The Mexican needed no urging.

He was off as fast as he could run.

But Wild did not hasten after him.

He moved rather slowly, keeping his eyes turned in the direction the shot had come from.

He had got perhaps twenty-five feet from the mouth of the cave when—

Crack!

Another shot rang out and a bullet whistled so closely to the head of Pedro that he uttered a yell of alarm.

Crack!

Wild fired a shot with his revolver at the spot he had seen the flash come from, and then quickly stepped behind a boulder.

A howl of pain told him that he had not missed hitting something that was alive.

He knew that Charlie and the rest would be there in no time, so he was in no hurry to get away from the spot.

The camp was less than two hundred yards away in a

straight line, and in a few seconds there was likely to be a lively fight in progress.

"Whoopee! Whoopee!" rang out close at hand.

It was the warwhoop of Cheyenne Charlie.

No more shots were fired.

"Where are yer, Wild?" called out the voice of the scout.

"Here!" answered the daring young deadshot, and then he quickly moved from behind the boulder and got into a clump of bushes.

He expected a shot would be fired, but none came.

The next minute his friends rushed up and he joined them.

"It's all right, boys!" he exclaimed. "No one hurt, I guess."

All the males of the party except Zeke Putnam were there.

The two cowboys who had been guarding the secret entrance to the underground headquarters of the villainous bandits had left their post to join in the fight they expected would take place.

But all was as still as the grave now.

For reasons best known to themselves the bandits were keeping out of the way.

Our friends waited a minute and then went toward the cave.

Just then a volley was fired from a point off to the right.

One of the cowboys uttered a sharp cry of pain and dropped to the ground.

Jim Dart sprang forward and caught hold of him.

"Are you hurt much?" he asked.

"A piece of my left ear's gone, I reckon," was the reply. "I thought I was a goner!"

The man got upon his feet and Jim hurried him for the camp.

The rest remained where they were, crouching behind the rocks.

They could now hear the sounds made by receding footsteps.

The Mexicans were retreating.

"Come on, why don't you?" cried Young Wild West. "If you want to fight it out, come on!"

A mocking laugh was the reply.

"That was Don Aguilla," said Charlie. "I reckon I'd know his laugh anywheres."

"Yes, that was him," retorted our hero. "But he's afraid to fight squarely. The scoundrels must have had another way to get out of the cave, I guess."

"Well, it would be rather strange that they didn't, when you come to think of it."

"Ther measly coyotes is afraid ter show themselves," declared the scout. "They fired an' then run away like a lot of scared wolves. Jest wait till I git a chance ter draw a bead on some of 'em."

"That won't be to-night, I guess," said our hero. "They are not going to take any chances, it seems."

They now stepped into the camp.

Jim was binding up the wounded ear of the cowboy and Anna, Eloise and the Yankee and his wife were looking on.

"Where's Et?" Wild asked.

"She ran out after the rest with her rifle," answered Anna, looking surprised. "Isn't she with you?"

Wild's face turned pale.

"She ran after the rest, did she?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Well, where is she, then? We never saw her?"

Then he called his sweetheart's name loudly.

But there was no reply.

Arietta had vanished in some mysterious manner.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THE BANDITS DID.

It could not have been more than five minutes after Wild made his escape with Charlie when the bandits discovered that he was missing.

Don Aguilla flew in a rage and ordered the men to make a quick search of the cave.

"He cannot find the way out!" he added. "Look in every dark place till he is found, and when he is found the man who tied the knots when he was bound must report to me!"

Hurriedly the Mexicans hastened to make the search, while the man who had bound our hero's hands behind him began to shiver in his boots.

But, unlike the rest, he began to search about the place where the prisoner had been placed but a few minutes before.

And in doing this he could but find the severed pieces of rope that Charlie had cut from Wild's wrists and ankles.

This cleared the bandit of any suspicion the captain might have that he had not tied the knots properly.

He promptly called Don Aguilla.

Frowning and twisting his mustache fiercely, the leader of the villains went to the spot.

"Someone cut the prisoner loose," said the man.

Don Aguilla frowned deeper than ever.

"There must be a traitor among us!" he exclaimed.

Then he walked back into the place that was occupied by them as a living apartment and sat down.

He looked out of the opening that was directly over the chasm and fell to reflecting.

A rope had been drawn across the dangerous place since Wild was shown it, for the bandits were afraid they might forget themselves some time and go too near the edge.

Don Aguilla sat there in silence for the space of five minutes.

He was trying hard to think of a man he could place the blame of Young Wild West's escape on.

But he could not think of one who would prove such a traitor as that.

He was puzzling his brain over it when one of his most trusted men came to him and reported that the boy was nowhere in the cavern.

Don Aguilla arose to his feet.

"Are you certain of this?" he asked.

"Certain, Captain," was the reply.

"Then one of our men must have cut him loose and showed him the way out."

The bandit who had reported shook his head.

"I am positive that none of the men went that way to do it," he declared, shaking his head to emphasize his words.

"Then how could it have happened?"

The man shook his head.

"You don't know, eh?" asked the captain.

"No, Captain. But I feel positive that none of the men did it."

"Well, I hope they did not. In that case it would have gone hard with the one who did it when I found it out. It may be that some of Young Wild West's friends discovered the rope tied to the rock before it was removed, and that they have found a way in the cave the same as he did."

"And found the regular way to get out," added the bandit.

"It must be so," and Don Aguilla scowled and gritted on his teeth. "Jose, we must get ready to leave here."

"I think so, Captain," answered Jose.

"But maybe it will not do to go out by the regular way. Young Wild West's friends will probably be waiting and watching for us. They will shoot us down as fast as we come out, for they will want to avenge the death of the men we threw over the cliff. Young Wild West knows that we did it, and he will surely try to pay us for it. He will not stop until we have surrendered, or all have been shot down."

"I agree with you, Captain," said Jose.

The conversation was carried on in Spanish, as might be supposed; but we translate it into English.

"Jose," went on Don Aguilla, "we have a way to get in and out of here other than the entrance that is now covered by the big stone slab."

"Yes, Captain."

"But we cannot take our horses out that way."

"No, Captain."

"Well, Jose, you go out and spy on the American dogs and see what they are up to. You can learn whether Young Wild West got out through the assistance of his friends or not."

"Yes, Captain."

Jose now followed the bandit leader to a side of the main cave, where a couple of bearskins sewed together hung.

Don Aguilla pulled the rude curtain aside and a passage just wide enough to admit a man comfortably without squeezing was disclosed.

"There you are, Jose!" he exclaimed. "Go and find out what I want to know, and be careful that you are not seen by the American dogs. There is a treasure about here

somewhere, and we must have it! But we must not run the risk of losing our men. We have already lost one, and I mean to have a still further revenge for it before I am done with Young Wild West."

"Yes, Captain," answered the Mexican, and then he bowed and left his superior.

Don Aguilla began pacing back and forth in the cave. The villain was much disturbed over what had happened.

Bold bandit, as he had chosen to call himself, he was afraid of the dashing young American called Young Wild West.

The boy had shown how superior he was to him, and that made the Mexican fear him.

His men gradually drifted back to the main cave after making a fruitless search for our hero.

Their leader had little or nothing to say to them, and, like the cowards they were, they feared and respected him to such an extent that they were very uneasy.

Ten minutes passed by.

Then the bandit called Jose came back.

"I have learned enough, Captain," he said, saluting his superior.

"What have you learned?" demanded Don Aguilla.

"The American boy was rescued by his friend, who came down the rope right after he was seized and brought here. He hid himself among the horses and watched while the men opened and shut the stone slab."

"Is that so, Jose?" cried the captain.

"Yes, that is so."

"How did you learn this?"

"I heard them conversing right before the entrance."

"They are there, then?"

"Yes, they are digging to make the stone slab so it cannot be let down."

The bandit leader's face turned pale.

"They think to imprison us in here and force us to surrender, I suppose," he said, after a pause. "Well, we will fool them on that point."

"Yes, Captain; they mean to post a guard outside and watch for us to try and leave the cave."

"Well, for fear that they might take a notion to force their way in here we will fix the entrance so that the slab cannot be dropped. Come!"

He led the way through the stable and passage to the hidden entrance.

There were several logs and posts lying there, and under his directions they were braced against the stone in such a way that it could not be dropped.

The work was done with little or no noise, for now that they were aware that they were supposed to be trapped by Young Wild West they did not want to let him know the difference.

When the entrance was blocked to his full satisfaction Don Aguilla went back to the main cave.

"Men," said he, we have enough provisions here to last

us a week. What we need most is food for our horses. We must go out to-night and get that."

"That can easily be done," answered Jose, who was really second in command of the band.

"Yes, that can be done, and in the meantime one of you must keep a watch on the movements of the American dogs. They came to get the treasure that the man called Pedro found. I am sure of this, because he is with them."

The eyes of the avaricious fellows lighted at this remark.

They thirsted for wealth, and they did not want to work for it.

Don Aguilla decided to go out and have a peep at his enemies himself.

He entered the passage and went up a gentle ascent, turning this way and that, until finally he came to the top of the cliff that overhung the chasm some twenty feet above the roof of the cave occupied by the lawless gang of Mexicans.

Rocky crags were on every hand and the hiding-places for a number of men were many near the mouth of the passage.

Don Aguilla dropped upon his hands and knees and crawled to a point from which he could look down into the rocky gully that was known as Death Divide.

He caught sight of the two cowboys on duty as guards the very first thing.

Don Aguilla gritted on his teeth.

He pulled his revolver from his belt and acted as though he was going to try a shot at the cowboys.

But he changed his mind and put it back again.

Evidently he felt that his aim would not be very good at that distance.

Still, it was not more than a hundred and fifty feet.

Young Wild West could have picked off a man at that distance.

But Don Aguilla was not a deadshot.

That made considerable difference.

The leader of the band of Mexicans remained there a few minutes looking around and then went back to the quarters in the cave below.

He had been unable to see the camp of our friends owing to the fact that it was hidden behind a hill and grove of trees.

Once back among his men he told them that nothing would be done until after dark.

Then the bandits proceeded to pass the time away as best they could.

Some went to sleep, others played cards for money and others simply sat down and smoked and read from the well-worn papers they had in their possession.

Just before darkness began to gather the bandits cooked their supper over a fire that was kindled in a roughly-made fireplace near the brink of the chasm.

They had a couple of joints of stovepipe which let out the smoke.

As the pipe was portable, they only put it up when they needed a fire.

Supper eaten, Don Aguilla selected ten men and told them to get ready to go out with him as soon as it got dark.

"We will spy upon the enemy and gather some grass for the horses at the same time," he said.

It finally got dark enough for their purpose, and then they left the cave by the narrow passage.

Once at the top of the beetling cliff they paused and took a look around.

"We will have to be very careful that we are not seen by them," the leader said. "There is no need of having a fight unless we are sure we can do it without losing a man."

They worked their way down into Death Divide and then moved around to the other side of the camp of our friends.

It so happened that they got there just after Wild and Pedro set out for the treasure cave.

But the Mexicans did not get close enough to count all that were there, so they did not miss them.

After remaining there for a few minutes they worked their way around toward the gorge from the other side, the men gathering grass as they went.

It so happened that Don Aguilla came in sight of the lantern just as Pedro came out of the treasure cave with it.

Acting on a sudden impulse, he told Jose, who was considered a good shot with the rifle, to fire at the man who carried it.

As the lantern was extinguished, Don Aguilla told those who had the fodder for the horses to start for the cave, keeping four men there with him.

When the next shot was fired by one of his men and an answering shot came from Young Wild West and wounded the fellow, the captain became enraged.

"Wait till you can see them, and then we'll all fire together," he said. "They will not attempt to come after us in the dark."

The volley was fired and they saw one of the men drop.

Then it was that Don Aguilla saw a female figure hurrying around toward them as though trying to keep out of the firing range.

A sudden idea struck him.

"We will capture the girl!" he exclaimed. "One of you come with me."

It was Arietta who was coming, as may be supposed.

And the girl walked right into a trap.

In less than a minute from the time Don Aguilla made up his mind to capture her she was seized and her cries smothered.

Then she was borne away to the passage that led down into the underground headquarters of the bandits.

CHAPTER X.

ARIETTA'S DASH FOR LIBERTY.

It was no doubt a foolish move on Arietta's part for leaving the camp at all.

But she wanted to help her dashing young lover in his fight against the bandits.

She believed the villains had caught him at a great disadvantage, and that meant that he needed assistance.

To avoid being hit by any stray bullets she ran around where the villains could get at her.

When Don Aguilla and one of his men pounced upon her they did it so suddenly that she had not the least chance to put up a fight, though she had her revolver ready for instant use.

A hand was clapped over her mouth, her arms pinned to her sides and then a mantle was thrown over her head.

She struggled to free herself, but it was of no use, and finally she was conscious of the fact that she was being carried down a passage.

Both her feet and head occasionally bumped against the rocky sides of the passage, and that was how she knew it.

It was not until they reached the cave that the bandits placed her on her feet.

"Now, senorita," said Don Aguilla, "you must keep perfectly quiet and remain where you are standing. If you attempt to run away you may go over the cliff, like the man who was a friend of Young Wild West did to-day. Remember that, though you are a female, we would not hesitate to kill you! Half a dozen pistols are pointed at you at this very minute."

Arietta knew that she had a desperate lot of villains to deal with.

She had recovered herself by this time, and though somewhat frightened, she was not ready to give away to despair.

"Let me go, you scoundrels!" she exclaimed. "How dare you carry me off in this manner?"

"We dare to do anything," answered Don Aguilla, coolly. "We are outlaws against our own government, so what care we for you Americans?"

"You will find that you are dealing with the best people on earth when you have anything to do with Americans!" exclaimed the girl, spiritedly. "I am not afraid of you. You dare not harm me; so make all the threats you have a mind to. Young Wild West will save me, and he will punish you for what you have done. You can make up your mind to that, sir!"

"I admire your great courage, senorita," answered the leader of the bandits. "You are a real beauty, even if you are an American girl. You have what you Yankees call grit, I must declare. I believe you would fight as well as a man."

"Give me a chance and I will show you," was the retort. "Do you dare to give me my revolver and stand off ten paces and fight a duel with me?"

"Ha, ha, ha! What do you think of that, men?" cried Don Aguilla, in his native tongue. "A brave girl, is she not?"

A murmur of approval went up from the villainous band.

"I know who you are," resumed Arietta, who was now as

calm as though she was but talking to a number of friends. "You are Don Aguilla, the leader of the villains who robbed Pedro of the gold he found. Then you made up your mind that you would find the place where he got it, but that you will never find! You will not live long enough to find it!"

"You talk as though you were a prophet, *senorita*," said the captain, sneeringly.

"Do I? Well, I have often prophesied things, and they have always come true, too. I now prophesy that you will not live to find the place where there is so much gold coin hidden. Do you hear what I say? Before another sunset comes you will die, Don Aguilla!"

Arietta knew that Mexicans were more or less superstitious, so that is why she talked that way.

Her words had great effect, for an expression of uneasiness crossed the face of the captain, while his men looked at one another and shrugged their shoulders.

"Put a leather thong about her waist and tie her to that jutting piece of rock over there," said Don Aguilla, pointing to the place. "She must not have the least chance to escape. If she cries out gag her."

The captured girl was forced to submit to being tied about the waist with a stout leather thong and then she was led over to the jutting piece of rock, which was bigger at the end than where it projected from, and thus made a fine thing to tie it to.

"Make her as comfortable as possible, for I may take a notion to wed the *senorita* after the trouble is all over," said Don Aguilla, sarcastically.

This was not pleasing to the ears of Arietta, but she managed to flash a glance of contempt at the speaker.

Once tied to the rock, there was no chance of getting free from it without the aid of a knife, and even if she had one her captors would surely have prevented her from using it the moment she made the attempt.

But though her knife and revolver had been taken from her belt, Arietta had a weapon in the bosom of her dress.

She always carried a small silver-plated Colt's revolver there, and the villains had not thought of searching her after they took the weapons that were visible on her person.

The brave girl had not drawn this, because she knew it would have been no use to put up a fight in the cave against the bandits.

She meant to use it before she was through with them, however.

Don Aguilla now ordered half a dozen of his men to go to the sealed entrance and stand guard.

"If the American dogs succeed in forcing the slab down fire on them as they attempt to get in," he said. "Not one of them could get as far as here alive."

This was no doubt the truth.

But it was hardly probable that they were going to rush headlong to their death.

As the minutes flitted by and nothing was heard that

would indicate that Wild was coming to her rescue, Arietta made up her mind that she must wait.

It never once occurred to her that he would not come.

She knew him too well for that.

He would try to effect her rescue by strategy.

She sat down on the pile of skins and blankets that had been placed in the corner for her use.

The night gradually drifted on and the situation was the same.

When a couple of hours had passed the girl could not help noticing that the bandits were very jubilant.

They no doubt felt that they were safe from being found by their enemies.

"Well, if it is so that Wild cannot find the way to get to me I will have to do the best I can toward effecting my release," thought Arietta. "I will have to wait till the opportunity comes, though."

And she did wait.

She waited the whole night long, sleep never once coming to her eyes.

The girl felt that it would be dangerous to go to sleep among that villainous lot of men.

When the daylight came in through the opening over the cliff the lantern that had been burning all night was extinguished by one of the men who had been on guard.

Four of them had been sitting close to her all the time, so Arietta had no chance of trying to make her escape.

As it grew lighter the rest began to stir.

But when Don Aguilla appeared, as one of the bandits was in the act of lighting the fire to cook breakfast, he told him not to do it.

"We must not give them the least chance of finding where we are," he said. "We must wait for our coffee. We have bread and cooked meat; we will wash it down with water."

So they had a cold breakfast.

Some food was offered to Arietta, but she refused it.

She now felt that it would not be long before she got away from her captors.

Something seemed to tell her that.

After he had finished his meal, Don Aguilla turned to Jose, his lieutenant, and said:

"I am going to take the risk of having a look around."

"Look out, Captain, that you are not seen," was the reply.

"I surely will. But I think no one would think of looking for a way to get in here where the passage starts from. We are safe, Jose, and you know it."

"Yes, Captain."

Arietta was watching him, and when Don Aguilla lifted the curtain and left the cave she knew the way out.

"I will leave by that way, and very soon," she said to herself.

In about ten minutes the bandit leader came back.

"I see nothing of them," he said, "though the smoke is rising from their campfire. They will never find the passage, and if they do what good will it do?"

There was a mocking laugh that came from him and his followers joined in.

None of the men paid any attention to Arietta.

They were not watching her as closely as the guards had during the night.

Pretty soon all but one left the main cave to look after their horses and probably listen at the sealed entrance.

The Mexican who remained started to roll a cigarette.

He was standing less than ten feet from Arietta, his back to her.

The brave girl felt that her chance had now come.

Thrusting her hand into her bosom, she drew out her revolver.

There were just six shots in it, and she made up her mind to use them if it came to the point.

"Senor," said she suddenly, speaking in a low tone.

The Mexican had just finished rolling his cigarette and he was in the act of lighting it.

He turned quickly and found himself staring at the muzzle of a six-shooter.

"One word and you die, senor!" exclaimed Arietta.

The bandit realized instantly that the girl meant to keep her word.

He knew the revolver in her hand was just as dangerous as though it had been in the hand of a man.

"Step up closer, senor."

He hesitated, but a look in her eye told him that he had better obey.

He moved over and then stood still, the cigarette in one hand and the match he had been about to light it with in the other.

Then, without moving the revolver a particle, the girl reached out with her left hand and took the knife from his belt that was right there for the purpose, it seemed.

The knife once in her hands, she quickly severed the thong that was tied about her waist.

"Now, senor, if you follow me I will surely shoot you!" she exclaimed, as she moved over to the curtain of skins.

The Mexican did not offer to move.

Arietta then made a sudden leap for the place she wanted to reach, and, pulling the curtain aside, darted into the passage.

At the very moment she disappeared the bandit let out a yell to alarm his companions.

Then he darted for the passage, no doubt thinking he could overtake the girl in the narrow place before she could fire on him.

But that was where he made the mistake of his life.

Arietta knew she had to do it to save herself, so she fired the very instant the man entered the passage.

He dropped and she sped on as fast as she could make her way.

But before she got to the opening she knew that some of the villains were in hot pursuit through the passage.

The girl kept on, however.

She was ready to put up the fight of her life.

On went the brave girl, and soon she reached the mouth of the passage.

She was bewildered at the sight of the rocky gorge below, but she did not hesitate to pick out what she thought was the best way down and run for all she knew how.

It was extremely dangerous for her to do this, too, for one misstep and she might fall to her death.

She was probably fifteen yards from the mouth of the passage when Don Aguilla appeared.

Behind him, one after the other, came his followers.

Arietta cast a fleeting glance over her shoulder and saw them.

"Wild! Wild!" she shouted. "Help! Help!"

She knew her lover and his companions must surely hear her, and that meant that she would be saved.

An answering shout came from behind a little hillock, and then she darted into the gully.

But Don Aguilla and his men kept right on coming, determined to recapture the girl.

Down among the rocks she went, and then hearing the shouts of her friends, she turned and stood at bay.

CHAPTER XI.

GETTING OUT THE TREASURE.

"Take the senorita alive!" shouted Don Aguilla, as he led the way toward Arietta; "don't shoot!"

Crack!

Arietta fired, and one of the Mexicans, who was leveling his pistol at her, went down.

But they kept right on coming, Don Aguilla taking care to keep behind the rocks as much as possible.

Crack!

It was the third shot Arietta fired since her dash for liberty and another bandit was hit.

Crack!

Crack!

She did not hesitate, but sent two more bullets into the ranks of the villains.

But four of them were almost upon her now, and, rendered desperate, she shot the foremost one, and then, gripping the empty revolver by the barrel, stood ready to beat them off.

It was a great fight that Arietta made, but the Mexicans came on, more determined than ever.

Not until she had fired her last shot did she despair of making her escape.

But Wild and his partners were close at hand now.

Suddenly our hero's voice sounded:

"Give it to them, boys!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three shots rang out and then the Mexicans turned and fled.

Arietta was saved.

Young Wild West dashed up and caught his sweetheart in his arms, while Cheyenne Charlie and the rest made after the fleeing bandits.

A few shots were fired by Don Aguilla's men, but none of them took effect.

When they were completely routed and out of sight Wild took his sweetheart by the arm, and, facing her to the rest, said:

"What do you think of her, boys? Isn't she the bravest girl that ever lived?"

"Hooray for Arietta!" yelled Cheyenne Charlie, swinging his sombrero in the air.

"Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!" came from the lips of the cowboys.

It must have been galling to Don Aguilla to hear that cheer.

It came from the hearts of those who gave it utterance.

With locked arms Wild and Arietta led the way back to the camp.

The girls all wanted to hug the brave girl at once, while Hortense fairly cried with delight at seeing her alive and unharmed.

Charlie, Jim and the cowboys remained out a few minutes hunting for the bandits, but they came in and reported that they must have succeeded in getting back to their cave.

"Seven of 'em went under," the scout said, with a grim smile on his rugged face. "Arietta didn't empty her shooter for nothin', I reckon."

"But I only had five shots left when I faced them," she exclaimed, turning to him.

"Well, I reckon some of us is responsible for them you didn't drop, then."

"Well, I had to shoot one as I was leaving the cave. I didn't want to do it, since it was really through him that I got away. But he meant to stop me if he could."

"Well, Arietta, I reckon there ain't one of them Mexican galoots what's fit ter live, anyhow," said the scout, shaking his head. "If ther soldiers around these parts was any good they wouldn't be goin' around holdin' up people like they do."

"Great haystacks!" exclaimed Zeke Putnam, as he finally got a chance to shake the hand of the brave girl. "You're a wonder, you are! If ever there was a fittin' mate fur Young Wild West it's you. When ther weddin' takes place I'll feel mighty slighted if I don't git a bid."

"Well, when Arietta and I get married I guess you'll be invited," answered our hero, with a laugh. "I am only a boy yet and she's only a little girl. A fellow should be at least twenty-five before he gets married, I think, and then he should be ready to settle down and make a good husband. I couldn't settle down yet, not by any means. Besides, neither of us desires to get married yet. We are satisfied to be just plain, ordinary sweethearts."

It was not until Arietta had related what had taken place that breakfast was thought of.

Then, when it was ready, they sat down to a repast of

nice thick venison steaks broiled just right, coffee, baked potatoes and meal muffins, such as Anna alone could make.

Our friends enjoyed that meal as much as any they had ever eaten.

The gold coins Wild and Pedro had taken from the cave were wrapped in a blanket in one of the tents, and after breakfast they were shown to Arietta.

The sight was enough to dazzle the eyes of one not used to seeing so much wealth lying around, but she simply smiled and remarked:

"Well, I guess we did not come here for nothing, did we?"

"No," answered Wild. "But I am of the opinion that we will go away with a great deal more gold than what you see here. That cave has plenty in it. Pedro says there is another urn full of the coins there which we did not see last night. And there is no telling but we will find more by doing a little digging."

"I hardly believe the bandits will attack us again, anyhow," remarked Arietta, as Wild wrapped up the treasure. "They cannot leave the cave with their horses unless they do it from the regular entrance, so I guess we have got them penned in. It would be very little trouble to seal up the passage I made my escape through, as it is only large enough to admit one person at a time."

"Well, I guess that will be about the first thing we will do, then," said Wild. "Come, boys! I want you to go with me to settle the bandits from getting out of their cave. Jim, you stay here with Putnam and Pedro to be ready to protect the girls in case there are any of the villains outside of their cave looking for trouble."

Jim nodded.

He would have liked to be one of the party, but it was generally his lot to look after the camp in such cases.

Wild got full instructions from Arietta as to how they were to get to the passage and then started out with Charlie and the four cowboys.

They had no trouble in finding the place, though they were all willing to admit that they would not have had any idea that it started from up there.

"I reckon it won't take more'n a couple of minutes ter fix this place," observed Cheyenne Charlie, pointing to a boulder that must have weighed four or five hundred pounds. "Jest roll that over, boys!"

"That's right, Charlie," nodded our hero. "That is just the thing, and if that won't be enough there are plenty more that we can roll down on top of it."

Under their united efforts the boulder was quickly rolled up and dropped into the mouth of the passage.

It being very steep at the top, the boulder went down until it became wedged in about six or eight feet below.

To make sure another was rolled over on top of it, and then Wild knew he had the villains.

"If they are in there they will stay there until we get ready to let them out," he said.

"Well, I reckon they're there all right," Charlie re-

torted. "They was headin' this way ther last I seen of 'em, an' they was jest leggin' it like a lot of lame coyotes runnin' away from a prairie fire."

They descended into Death Divide and then made their way to the secret entrance to the cave.

It was just the same there as they had fixed it the night before.

The bandits had not taken the trouble to remove the rope.

Back they went to the camp.

"Now," said Wild, "Trusty Jerry and his men will remain in charge of the camp while the rest of us go to inspect the treasure cave. Come on!"

Then Wild set out with Arietta at his side.

The girl had not closed her eyes in sleep during the night, but she was eager to visit the treasure cave.

"As soon as we see it and find out what is there we'll come back to the camp," said Anna, speaking to Arietta and Eloise.

"Yes, for Et needs some sleep, I guess," replied Eloise.

As they were not sure that all the bandits were in their cave, our friends kept a sharp lookout.

It might be that a shot would be fired from ambush.

But nothing of the kind happened.

The way was perfectly clear, as far as the bandits were concerned.

Wild told Pedro to take the lead on entering the vine-covered hole that opened into the cave.

Pedro felt very important just then.

"Me show a-you somet'ing," he said, bowing to the girls. "Me a-find a somet'ing da Mexican government like a-to have."

In the cave he went, followed closely by Wild and Arietta.

Anna, Eloise and Hortense, the fat Mexican lady, came next, and then Charlie and Jim brought up the rear.

The cave was large enough to hold them all, but there was not a great deal of light admitted through the rather small opening.

Pedro walked over to the carved table of stone—if table it could be called—and, leaning over it, exclaimed:

"Da other urn is a-there!"

He stepped aside, pointing behind the stone table.

Wild and Jim went around it and found that he spoke the truth.

Under their united efforts they managed to roll the urn out into the center of the cave where there was more light.

Then all hands gathered around it.

It did not take two seconds for them to all see that it was nearly full of golden coins.

"I guess our trip to Mexico will be a paying one, all right," remarked Dart.

"I should reckon so," nodded the scout. "That's putty old money, but it'll go anywhere in ther world, jest ther same."

He picked up a handful of the coins as he spoke and blew the dust from them.

"I guess," said Wild, thoughtfully, "that Trusty Jerry and the other fellows would like to see this. It will please them, no doubt. Charlie, you and Jim go over to the camp and send them over to have a look. It will do their eyes good."

"All right," was the reply, and the two immediately left the cave.

The four cowboys came in a couple of minutes later.

"Take a look, boys," said Wild, "and just remember that you are to have a share of it."

"Jumpin' catamounts!" cried Trusty Jerry. "Ain't it funny that all that money has been here so long? It are more gold coins than I ever seed in one pile afore!"

"Well, just see if the four of you can carry the urn to the camp."

The cowboys immediately grabbed it and soon got it out of the cave.

Then it was quite easy for them to get it to the camp.

Wild was pretty sure that the men were strictly honest, but he thought it wise that they should not be led into temptation, so he told Jim to remain there with two of them, and the others to come back and bring picks and shovels with them.

In the rear of the cave there was every evidence of having been a cave-in at some time or other.

"Just dig over there, boys," he said, and then the men started in with a will.

Zeke Putnam had been looking on with distended eyes and drooping jaw.

It was all very wonderful to the Yankee.

"No wonder them blamed robbers want ter find out where ther treasure was," he said, looking at Wild. "I calculate this is worth findin', ain't it?"

"Well, I guess it is," was the reply. "But we were not sure that we would find anything like this when we struck out. We could not tell but that possibly Pedro's eyes might have magnified, you know."

After the men had worked away at the rear end of the cave for half an hour without any new discovery being made, Arietta declared that she was going to the camp to try and get some sleep.

Anna and Eloise started with her, and then, knowing that they had no claim on anything that was found, the Yankee and his wife followed.

The work continued, and at the expiration of an hour there was a sudden cave-in and a gallery was disclosed to view.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

When the gallery was disclosed to view our friends saw that their efforts had not been in vain, as far as making a further discovery was concerned.

Right before their eyes lay a heap of quaint-looking vessels, such as cups, bowls, urns and the like.

That they were made of silver and gold was evident, though time had lent a tarnish to them.

But this could easily be rubbed off, and when our hero stepped forward and picked up a golden cup he exclaimed:

"I guess that is worth something besides being used to drink from!"

All hands assisted in carrying out the find.

Wild looked it over when it was in a heap in the cave and estimated that when melted it would pan out for several thousand dollars.

Then they made a search of the gallery, but there was nothing more to be found.

The treasure was soon conveyed to the camp, and then there was nothing left to do but to get it to the American side of the Rio Grande as soon as possible.

"How much do you think the whole business will amount to—money an' all?" Charlie asked our hero.

"Well, at a rough estimate, I should say a hundred thousand dollars," was the reply.

"Dat a-fine!" exclaimed Pedro, acting like a child over a new toy.

"And half of it belongs to you," said Wild.

"No!" was the quick reply. "I a-no wanta so much. I take a-half da money; you take a-half da money, all da other you a-divide with a-rest."

"All right, Pedro. But suppose we leave the dividing until we get home?"

"Dat a-right! Me no a-live in Mexico no a-more; me be a rich Americano!"

"Well, boys, it won't do to leave Don Aguilla and his men shut up in that cave. It might be that they can never get out without help. I don't believe in starving even my worst enemy to death. I guess we had better go and see how they are making out."

A few minutes later Wild, Charlie and the four cowboys made their way to the sealed cave.

"I'll go up there and talk to them through the rift," said our hero, and then he promptly climbed to the top of the cone-shaped pile of stones.

He was a little bit careful about leaning over, but he finally did so and saw the horses beneath him.

"Hello!" he called out in a loud tone of voice.

Instantly there came an answering cry.

"Do you fellows want to get out of there?" Wild asked.

"Yes, senor," came the reply.

"How many are there of you?"

"Thirteen," was the quick retort.

"Call your captain; I want to talk with him."

The next minute Don Aguilla came out of the main cave and stood so Wild could see him.

"Are you going to surrender?" our hero asked.

"Will you let us go?" was the evasive rejoinder.

"Well, we might."

"We will surrender, then."

"All right. I will fix the slab of rock so you can open it from within. Then you can come out, one at a time."

"We don't want to come out, Senor Young Wild West."

"Oh! You want to stay in there, eh?"

"We don't want to come out while you and your friends are here."

"Oh! Well, there is nothing in the place Pedro told us the treasure was in; it is bare of anything of value, so you needn't expect to get rich all of a sudden."

"We don't want any treasure, senor."

"I suppose you would sell us a couple of your horses, senor?" asked our hero.

"Yes!" was the quick reply.

"Well, we will fix it so you can lower the slab. Then you come out yourself and fetch two horses that you want to sell with you. We are going to leave Death Divide right away."

Wild now descended, and in a few minutes the lariat was untied from the post and stone.

Then they could hear the Mexicans working away on the inside of the cave.

In about ten minutes the slab moved slowly downward, just as though it was hesitating about opening.

Then up the incline came Don Aguilla, leading two horses that were saddled and bridled.

The leader of the bandits looked very crestfallen, indeed.

"You can take these two horses for two hundred dollars," he said.

"All right. I'll pay you right away."

Wild had the money on his person, and when the bandit leader saw him produce it from a buckskin bag he had tied about his neck he no doubt thought that he had been foolish because he had not relieved him of it when he held the boy a prisoner the day before.

Don Aguilla took the money and placed it in a pocket of his silk waistcoat.

"I am sorry that one of your men is dead," he said, apologetically.

"Oh, don't be sorry, Don Aguilla. The man you killed came to life again."

"Impossible!"

"No, it isn't impossible. I'll have him come here so you can see him."

A word to one of the cowboys started him to the camp to bring Zeke Putnam there.

When the Yankee appeared a couple of minutes later the face of the bandit leader turned a sickly yellow.

"How is it that you are alive?" he asked.

"Oh, I fell ag'in a tree, an' then I caught my foot in some vines an' managed ter git my hands loose. I got on a ledge an' then I got away as easy as nothin'. You thought you'd done me, you scamp, didn't yer?"

"I thought so, senor. But I am glad I did not. Now you have nothing against me or my men, so you will not bother us."

"I don't know but what you'd oughter be lynched. If you was over in Arizony you'd git it mighty quick."

"Well, come on, boys; we'll leave these fellows to get

caught by the Mexican soldiers. I guess we'll strike out now."

As they went away the expression on the face of Don Aguilla turned to one of the deepest hate.

"They have found the treasure and they are going away with it," he muttered in Spanish. "I must make one big effort to get it."

Then he went back into the cave.

As soon as our friends got back to the camp they immediately began making preparations to leave.

"Say!" said Zeke Putnam, "you're goin' over to our ranch with us, ain't yer?"

"I'm afraid we'll have to postpone our visit until some other time," retorted Wild. "You know just how we are fixed. If it became known that we Americans had found a lot of gold here and were taking it out of the country we'd get into a peck of trouble in no time."

"Well, I calculate that's about right. You'd better go right fur ther Rio Grande as soon as yer kin. It's disappointin' ter me an Hortense, but yer kin come an' see us some other time."

"That's right. But before we leave you I am going to make you and Hortense a little present. I am going to take it on myself to give you the biggest gold cup that was found in the treasure cave. I guess Pedro will be willing that I put a few gold coins in it, too. You can keep the cup to remember your visit to Death Divide."

The eyes of the newly-wedded couple sparkled with delight.

They had not expected anything like this.

They both thanked him, and then Pedro stepped up and assured them that they should have as much of the money as Wild saw fit to present them with.

It took them some little time to get ready to start.

It was no easy matter to get the treasure packed so it would not draw attention.

Finally they were ready, and off they went, Zeke and Hortense riding along in their buckboard.

When they got to the place where they were to part company Wild gave them the present he had spoken of.

Both thanked him warmly, and then, after a hearty handshake with all hands, they turned and headed for Montezuma.

Our friends made fairly good headway that day, and when night came they halted at the same spot they had camped at last on their way over.

Wild was not quite sure that the bandits would not follow them.

He knew that if they got it in their heads that they had found the treasure they would risk a whole lot to get it from them.

Things went along smoothly until about midnight.

Then Wild, who was doing guard duty himself just then, detected a suspicious sound in the bushes not far away.

He told Trusty Jerry and another of the cowboys who

were on duty with him of it and then started to crawl toward the point where the sound came from.

Wild moved with the greatest of caution.

He soon reached the spot.

He was just in time to see the form of a man sneaking off through the bushes.

Rising to his feet, he made for him with a bound.

The man turned and whipped out a dagger, the steel blade shining in the starlight.

Young Wild West was not surprised to see that it was Don Aguilla.

Then he quickly drew his hunting-knife and closed with the villain.

"Young Wild West must die!" hissed he bandit captain.

He lunged fiercely at the boy as he spoke, but the blow was parried with the greatest of ease.

"Is it to be a fight to the death, senor?" asked Wild.

"Yes!" was the hissing response.

Our hero could see other shadowy forms approaching, so he called out to his friends.

When he was convinced that the man meant to kill him he rushed in, to put an end to the fight.

Just as Cheyenne Charlie, with three or four at his heels, came rushing up, Don Aguilla fell to rise no more.

Then the shadowy forms disappeared.

"Boys, it is all over," said Wild, calmly. "I guess they'll leave us alone after this. Their leader has gone under."

There is not much more to add to this story.

Young Wild West and his companions finally reached Buckhorn Ranch without anything out of the ordinary happening.

The treasure was divided so that everyone was satisfied.

Pedro was a very happy man.

He declared that he would open a hotel over at Short Creek, a village some five miles from the ranch, and start in to make a fortune.

"Well," said Wild, as they all sat on the broad veranda of the ranch-house the next day, "I guess Death Divide over in Mexico is full of treasures yet, but I don't know as I want to go there right away. It was there that Arietta's great fight took place, and that is why I don't think much of the place."

"Yes, but it turned out all right, Wild," Arietta answered, with a smile.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE SCARLET SEVEN; OR, ARIETTA'S DARING LEAP," which will be the next number (165) of "Wild West Weekly."

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